Living in Limbo

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*Homeless Young People's
Paths to Housing*

Paula Mayock and Sarah Parker

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Acknowledgements

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Glossary of Terms

B&B: Bed and Breakfast

ETHOS: European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

LTA: Long-term Accommodation

PEA: Private Emergency Accommodation: this may include hotels, B&Bs and other residential facilities that are used on an emergency basis.

PRS: Private Rented Sector

RAS: Rental Accommodation Scheme

STA: Supported Temporary Accommodation: accommodation, including hostels, with onsite professional support.

TEA: Temporary Emergency Accommodation: emergency accommodation with no (or minimal) support.

Executive Summary

This publication documents the findings of a qualitative longitudinal study of youth homelessness in Ireland. Initiated in 2013, the research aimed to 'track' homeless young people over time in order to more fully understand their trajectories through and possibly out of homelessness. A key aim was to generate in-depth knowledge and understanding of the factors, processes and dynamics that impact the housing transitions of homeless young people *over time.* The research makes an innovative departure from previous qualitative longitudinal studies of youth homelessness, both in Ireland and elsewhere, by including the views and perspectives of a family member of approximately one quarter of the study's young people.

The findings presented in Chapters 3–7 are concerned primarily with uncovering the drivers of young people's 'journeys' through homelessness, with specific attention directed to their experiences of accessing housing.

Study Design

The study was designed to capture temporal dimensions of the homeless experience and involved the collection of data at two points in time; the first between May 2013 and January 2014 (Phase 1) and the second between July 2015 and April 2016 (Phase 2).

Recruitment and Retention

At baseline, 40 'out of home' young people (including 25 young men and 15 young women) aged between 16 and 24 years enlisted in the study. Participants were recruited from a range of statutory and non-statutory services in Dublin (34 participants) and Cork (six participants) targeting homeless or 'at risk' youth. The types of services used as recruitment sites included: emergency, short-term and supported temporary accommodation services; crisis intervention services; drop-in/day centres; education, training and employment services; and aftercare services. To be eligible for participation in the research, young people had to be:

1. Aged between 14 and 24 years;
2. Currently homeless or living in temporary, insecure, or unfit accommodation; or

3. 'At risk' of homelessness by virtue of having experienced housing instability or a previous episode of homelessness.

Where appropriate, permission was sought from participating young people to contact a nominated family member and this resulted in the conduct of a further ten interviews, five of them with a parent (all mothers) of participating young people and five with a sibling (all sisters). At Phase 1, the sample comprised 40 young people and ten family members. During Phase 2 of the study, 29 young people and eight family members were successfully 'tracked' and re-interviewed, yielding a retention rate of 74%.

Phase 1 (2013–14)	• 40 young people • 10 family members
Phase 2 (2015–16)	• 29 young people • 8 family members

Data Collection Methods

At baseline, life history interviews were conducted with all participating young people (n = 40) who, at the outset of the interview, were invited to tell their 'life story'. Following this open-ended invitation to share their life experiences, several topics and issues—homeless and housing history; family and peer relationships; education, training and employment; substance use; physical and mental health, and so on—were discussed, as relevant to individual young people. During follow-up (Phase 2) interviews, young people (n = 29) were asked to 'update' their life stories and to discuss any significant events, experiences or developments since the time of our first contact with them; they were also encouraged to reflect on their situations, past and present, and to talk about their perspectives on change and continuity in their lives.

Family members were interviewed in-depth during Phases 1 and 2 of the study and invited to share their views on their son's/daughter's/sibling's life circumstances, their homelessness and living situations and any concerns they had about the young person's well-being.

Sample Profile
The Study's Young People

Age: At baseline, the study's young people were aged between 14 and 24 years. Follow-up participants ranged in age from 18 to 26 years, which meant that all had reached the legal age of adulthood by Phase 2 of the study.

Gender: At baseline, 25 of the young people were male and 15 were female. Of the 29 young people who were re-interviewed at Phase 2, 17 were young men and 12 were young women.

Living situations: 39 of the study's 40 young people were homeless at Phase 1 of the research while just one participant—a young woman aged 22 years—had been recently housed following a prolonged period of housing instability. By Phase 2, 7 of the 29 (24%) who participated in a follow-up interview had exited homelessness while 22 either remained homeless or had entered into a living situation considered to be 'insecure' or 'inadequate'. Thus, *76% of the study's young people continued to experience homelessness* approximately two years subsequent to our first contact with them.

Homelessness/ Housing Status	Phase 1 (2013–14) Number (%)	Phase 2 (2015–16) Number (%)
Homeless	39 (98%)	22 (76%)
Housed	1 (2%)	7 (24%)
Total sample	*40 (100%)*	*29 (100%)*

The Study's Family Members

Relationship to the Study's Young People: At baseline, ten family members (including five mothers and five female siblings) were interviewed. Eight of these family members participated in a follow-up interview, four of them mothers and four female siblings.

Living Situations: Most of the study's family members remained in the same accommodation over the course of the study, which included private rental sector (PRS) housing (n = 1), a foster care placement (n = 1), Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) housing (n = 1) and private residences (n = 2). However, three participants, including two siblings and one mother, reported significant changes in their living arrangements. One mother, for example—who was residing in an emergency hostel alongside her adult daughter at the time of Phase 1—had moved to private rented accommodation by the time of follow up, while two siblings—who were living in transitional and PRS housing, respectively, at baseline—reported experiences of homelessness between Phases 1 and 2 of the study.

Young People's Homelessness and Housing Transitions

At Phase 2, the young people's homeless and housing situations were categorised according to ETHOS—European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

Young People's Living Situations at Phase 2,
Categorised according to ETHOS

Conceptual Category	No. of Young People		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*
Housed	3	4	7
Insecure	5	2	7
Houseless	8	4	12
Roofless	1	0	1
Inadequate	0	2	2

The data above suggest a continuum of residential stability and instability. At the time of follow-up, the largest category (n = 12 or 41%) were 'houseless' while one young person (3%) was 'roofless'. Seven young people (24%) were 'housed' and a further seven (24%) were 'insecurely' housed. The remaining two young people (8%) were living in 'inadequate' accommodation. Thus, less than one quarter of the study's young people had exited homelessness by Phase 2 of the study; furthermore, for some, these exits were tenuous and unstable.

Young People's Trajectories through Homelessness

All of the young people had moved at least once between Phases 1 and 2 of the research, with the vast majority reporting *multiple transitions* through a range of living situations. This level of transience compromised young people's ability to achieve and maintain any form of stability in their lives. To capture the young people's trajectories through homelessness, the following three-fold typology was developed in accordance with their reported levels of movement between living places (including homeless service settings, situations of 'hidden' homelessness and housing) over the course of the study:

1. *Linear Trajectories through Homelessness*
2. *Non-linear Trajectories through Homelessness*
3. *Chaotic Trajectories and Continuous Homelessness*

Broadly speaking, young people's accounts of residential movement and change—and their transitions between living situations—suggested more linear (and less chaotic) trajectories among those who: a) reported low(er) levels of mobility; b) were engaged with services and had established links with service professionals; c) had regular contact and positive relationships with family members; and d) reported low(er)-level needs in relation to substance use and mental health.

Young People's Stories of Movement and Residential Change

The Nature and 'Shape' of Young People's Engagement with Services

Positive relationships with service professionals (key workers, outreach workers, aftercare workers, social workers and so on) were linked to fewer and smoother transitions between living situations. Strong links or 'bonds' with service providers bolstered young people's ability and willingness to engage with homelessness and housing support systems, provided them with practical assistance in securing appropriate 'move on' accommodation and helped young people to better understand their entitlements in relation, for example, to social welfare assistance, rent allowance and so on.

> "I was linked in with a woman from [homelessness organisation]. *She's the one that got me the place* [STA]*, and she was a great help. I actually thought I was going nowhere until I met her."* (Fiona, 21, Phase 2)

However, a considerable number of young people reported a host of barriers to service engagement due to one or a number of the following:

- Past negative experiences with a service(s);
- Tenuous or strained relationships with staff members in one or more service settings;
- Disruption arising from their continuous movement between living situations; and/or
- No longer being able to access systems of intervention due, for example, to reaching (or exceeding) the maximum length of stay and/or failing to meet the eligibility criteria for service provision.

Disengagement from services placed young people at higher risk of embarking on trajectories characterised by high levels of residential displacement and social isolation, making them more vulnerable to continued homelessness and housing instability and exposing them to other risks, including substance use and mental health problems.

The Support Needs of Young People: Substance Use and Mental Health

A large number of participants reported complex and overlapping support needs, often related to long-standing mental health problems and/or problematic substance use. These young people's homeless and housing pathways were characterised by:

- Ongoing patterns of movement between service settings and situations of 'hidden' homelessness;
- Repeat stays in institutional settings, including acute or psychiatric hospitals, residential alcohol/drug treatment facilities and prison; and
- Heightened levels of substance use and/or deteriorating mental health that frequently coincided with periods spent sleeping rough and/or living (back) in emergency provision.

"[While sleeping rough] I was walking around and I was just thinking of things. My mind was over-thinking and I just burst out into tears and I couldn't stop like. And, to be honest, I felt a bit suicidal like. My mental health was at rock bottom. I felt like I was taking a nervous breakdown, I felt like I just couldn't take it anymore." (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)

The relationship between high levels of residential instability and young people's support needs (particularly in relation to substance use and mental health) was bi-directional in the sense that, on the one hand, prolonged patterns of movement between homelessness and insecure living situations were sometimes precipitated by drug- and/or mental health-related crises and, on the other, they served to exacerbate substance use and mental health problems, particularly with the passing of time. These findings suggest that young people's situations were being managed via homelessness service provision but not ultimately resolved due, at least in part, to long-standing issues related to their substance use and mental health.

Non-Housing Transitions

Young people's journeys through and out of homelessness typically involved a whole host of events and experiences that extended beyond those associated with housing. The range of personal, social, educational, familial and economic transitions reported was significant and also served to 'shape' their homelessness and housing trajectories over time.

Managing Peer Relationships

Peers featured centrally in young people's accounts of daily life and, by Phase 2 of the study, many viewed the management of their peer networks and disassociation from perceived stigmatised spaces (including homelessness service settings and/or street 'scenes') as playing an important role in their ability to deal with negative past experiences and move towards an independent lifestyle.

> *"I won't go near town, I'll avoid, I don't talk to anybody that I would have spoke to when I was living in town* [referring to homelessness services]. *Nobody knows where I am, and that's the way I want to keep it. Once you're out of town it's much easier. I'm staying away from all that shit now, robbing and picking up charges and all. I'm much happier . . . I'm trying to just keep the head down and it's going great so far."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

Education, Training and Employment

Young people identified access to education and labour market participation as critical to their capacity to exit homelessness. Those who had (re)engaged with education, training and/or employment reported that these transitions had a significant positive impact on their lives in the sense of enhancing their ability to live independently and manage their day-to-day expenses. These young people were also more likely to report a sense of personal direction and achievement.

> *"*[Working is] *brilliant, absolutely brilliant. It's nice to be able to just have money, to have a bit of a purpose to get up . . . I'm never worried about food, I never worry about having money, the rent will be paid. It's not very often that I'm upset or in a bad mood* [any more]*, I'm just always, I just feel so good all the time."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

However, a majority of the study's young people faced significant, ongoing barriers to educational engagement and labour market participation. Disengagement from, or limited access to, educational and employment opportunities negatively impacted these young people's sense of self-worth and reinforced their socio-economic marginalisation. A majority felt constrained by the lack of structure and routine in their lives, which often led to feelings of isolation and despair: *"It's a bit of a sad, miserable fucking existence really, do you know, what I mean. I'm not doing nothing like I'm just wasting a life, a fucking life away, that's all its doing"* (Michael, 25, Phase 2).

Family Relationship Transitions

The young people's narratives pointed to the dynamic, fluid and changing nature of 'family' and family relationships. Although a return home was not a feasible or realistic option for most, family reconnection and reconciliation was possible for many, particularly with the passing of time. Indeed, familial reconciliation was reported by a number who had previously perceived the resolution of family difficulties to be unlikely.

"I think the distance helped a lot [referring to her relationship with her mother]*, especially now me having my own life and her kind of having her own life as well. It's a lot better . . . more grown up, I suppose. Before it was more . . . just could never get along. But now we have a different relationship completely, even since we got back talking. She talks to me a lot different and we have different conversations than we would have had before. It's great to feel like I have them* [family] *to go to now again."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

"To be honest, I didn't think I'd ever be as happy as I am now that I'm back with my family … There's no better feeling." (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)

Narratives such as these emphasised the emotional, symbolic and enduring importance that young people attached to family and family ties; these participants viewed family as a cornerstone to the resolution of their homelessness and/or difficulties associated with housing instability, even in circumstances where a return to the family home was not possible.

The Transition to Parenthood

Twelve of the 29 young people (over 40%) who participated in a follow-up interview were parents and only five of these young people (four young women and one young man) were independently housed. Seven young parents were 'houseless' or living in situations of 'hidden' homelessness. The challenges associated with parenting in the absence of secure accommodation and social/financial supports were significant and accounts of this nature contrasted sharply with those of young people who had transitioned to stable housing with their child(ren).

"I'm just in constant stress about having nowhere to live while also thinking of the baby, things need to improve for her as well." (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

From Homelessness to 'Home'

Young people who had exited homelessness by Phase 2 of the study identified the transition to stable living situations as a significant 'turning point' in their lives that had distinct and personally significant effects on their sense of 'self' and 'place'. Several talked about the importance of the space, privacy and comfort that secure accommodation had provided, often pointing out that it had enabled them to feel 'in control' of their lives. Housing provided young people with a sense of security, a stable base from which to plan for the future and a sense of connectedness with local community and society more broadly.

> *"Living kind of away from the* [homelessness] *services, you get to choose who you're around and so it's a lot different. It was obviously what I needed at the time. But now, I wouldn't go back to it. I'm happy renting, I'm happy having my own space and still obviously linking in with staff is a good thing, but I'm happy to be away from hostels . . . I feel more normal. You can kind of do your own thing, have your own life. It's a lot better."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

Young people's experience of housing and 'home' simultaneously highlighted the complexity and diversity of their individual needs, as well as the varying ways in which they managed and made sense of 'identity' transitions as they navigated a route to stable housing.

Young People Negotiating a Route to Stable Housing

Routes to housing stability were unpredictable and precarious for young people. Only a minority (less than one quarter) had exited homelessness by Phase 2, although there were others who had exited temporarily but subsequently returned to homelessness. An array of experiences interacted to produce trajectories that facilitated or, alternatively, hindered or blocked a route to stable housing.

Young People's Support Systems:
The Role of Family and Service Professionals

Family support emerged as an important enabler for some young people as they transitioned through and/or out of homelessness services and this was particularly the case for young mothers in the study who returned home when they learned of a pregnancy. For all young people—including those for whom returning home was not an option—family connectedness conferred a sense of security and, for many, provided an important 'safety net', particularly during periods of particular need.

"It was only when I got my family support that I was able to pull myself out of homeless services. Like being in touch with your family can actually stop you from going out and using drugs or tapping [begging] *. . . I don't think I'd be on such good grounds without it. Like when you're not on solid ground you can start to feel like everything's crumbling, I have my family support and that's good enough for me now."* (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)

Young people who had exited homelessness by Phase 2 of the study also frequently talked about the role of formal supports in enabling them to navigate what was depicted as a daunting and intimidating task of sourcing and securing housing. For those who had positive relationships with professionals (including key workers and aftercare workers), the support they received certainly enhanced their ability to source and maintain housing:

- Positive relationships with service staff acted as an important enabler in that young people could avail of practical guidance, assistance and emotional support at critical junctures and transition points.
- Aftercare services provided important supports to young people both ahead of exiting the care system and subsequent to making that transition.

However, it appears that aftercare provision was not experienced uniformly by young people, which led a number to feeling unsupported as they exited the care system and also led them into situations of 'hidden' homelessness and housing precariousness.

Experiences in Housing: Exploring the Contours of Housing (In)stability

"Once you've been [homeless] *it's a constant feeling of uneasiness; you're never quite secure."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

Young people's experiences *in* housing varied, with some reporting relatively stable and what they perceived as sustainable exits to independent living situations. However, a far larger number of young people had either returned to homelessness following an exit to private rented accommodation or felt that they were at risk of becoming insecurely housed. Many who had experience of the private rented market reported a host of difficulties, not simply related to the challenge of sourcing affordable housing, but also associated with their youth and inexperience of navigating the private rental sector. The challenges reported by young people included:

- A lack of preparedness for independent living;
- Problematic tenancy relationships (that is, with landlords or letting agents);

- Loneliness and social isolation; and
- Insecurity of tenure.

"You're not in control of your housing [when renting a property without a formal lease]*, you're not in control of your own interests. I don't know, it's just a feeling that you get like you're not in control of your own lease. You're not in control of your stay or how angry they* [referring to landlord] *could get . . . I could lose the place. We don't have tenants' rights."* (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)

Care leavers who were not able to access or avail of targeted aftercare provision typically reported challenges as they made the transion from child to adult services and/or attempted to enter and navigate the private rented market. Financial stress was reported by all who had secured housing at some point over the course of the study and this, combined with other difficulties—including substance use and/or relapse, mental health problems, experiences of domestic violence or criminal justice contact—frequently posed a threat to their housing security. Most young people felt that they did not have adequate support *in* housing. A number of family members also articulated a perceived need for young people to receive preparation ahead of the move to independent housing, particularly in relation to budgeting and money management, loneliness and mental health issues: *"I would be a bit nervous for Maria and for* [Maria's daughter] *that she would be too isolated and too much on her own, you know?"* (Geraldine, Maria's mother, Phase 2).

Homeless Young People and Housing: Constraints and Barriers of Access

Barriers of Access to Affordable Housing

"There is not enough housing so like once you fall into this trap it's very, very hard to get out of it." (Michael, 25, Phase 2)

Housing affordability and availability emerged as the key drivers of homelessness and housing exclusion among the study's young people. Almost all of their accounts highlighted *multiple* economic and systemic constraints of access to housing. Problems associated with an unaffordable and highly competitive rental market were frequently compounded by one or more of the following:

- The poor standard of more affordable rental properties;
- Restrictive or inadequate rent supplement payments;
- Protracted waiting periods for social housing;

- Complex and unmet support needs;
- A lack of social and economic resources;
- Delays in accessing rent allowance or other social welfare support; and
- Discrimination on the part of landlords against those in receipt of rent subsidy.

A lack of affordable accommodation created blockages in the service system and resulted in many young people remaining in homelessness services for significant periods of time, thus producing continued or repeat patterns of homelessness. As a consequence, many expressed feelings of uncertainty, concern and despair about their futures and, in particular, about the enduring nature of their homelessness and whether it would ever be resolved.

> *"I just feel like giving up. There is nothing around . . . Like I can just see myself now just sitting, talking to you* [referring to interviewer] *for example in another two years time and just having been somewhere else, somewhere else and trying to still get a place. It's just not in my head now that I think I am going to get anywhere."* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)

Perceived Lack of Support and Service Fatigue

> *"I wouldn't go* [to services] *because they never helped before. So I don't know why they would now."* (Phoebe, 25, Phase 2)

Young people who were navigating the service system for longer and perceived little progress with securing housing frequently expressed a sense of service fatigue. Moreover, the absence of a perceived 'plan' for securing housing left both young people and their family members feeling "in the dark". A number of young people also commented on the 'facelessness' of their interactions with service providers, which left them feeling dehumanised by the service system: *"Neglected, I felt all that, I felt like I was only a number"* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2).

Negative experiences of this kind diminished young people's engagement with service professionals, in some cases, and did little to empower them to negotiate a route to stable housing. These young people typically expressed a sense of hopelessness about their situations, believing that they were 'falling through the gaps' and had ultimately become 'lost' in the homeless service system.

"I was more angry that nobody wanted to help me. Psychiatric ward couldn't help me; everywhere was just like, 'No. No.' [Homelessness organisation] couldn't help me. Everywhere was just palming me onto the next person, the next person, to the next person. And that's why I just went hell for leather on the drugs then." (Joe, 22, Phase 2)

Living 'Off Grid': Young People Seeking Alternative Routes to Housing

In the absence of appropriate or affordable housing options, a considerable number of the study's young people appeared to seek out alternative routes to what they considered to be more stable forms of accommodation. Their efforts to escape hostel life led many to spending periods living 'off grid', essentially in situations of concealed or 'hidden' homelessness (that is, living or 'doubling up' with family members, friends or acquaintances).

Those who had lived, or were living, in insecure housing of this kind almost always reported overcrowded or undesirable living conditions; most were not accessing (or visible to) formal support services and their accounts invariably emphasised hardships, vulnerabilities and risks. These living situations were highly unstable, not tenable in the longer-term and many of these young people subsequently returned to homelessness services.

"I moved over there, no lease or anything . . . Was only there about five to six months [and] the landlord came and told all the tenants in the house he was selling up. Now the house is sold and all so he's after leaving a lot of people homeless . . . I went into the [homeless] hostels [then], I did. I felt really angry. I felt really pissed off to be honest. Like the thoughts that go through your head are horrible like especially when you have to walk around the streets and all. That was very depressing." (Warren, 26, Phase 2)

Conclusions

Young People's Exits from Homelessness

- The proportion of young people that had exited homelessness over the course of the study (24%) was extremely low, contrasting strongly with an earlier longitudinal study of youth homelessness in Ireland (Mayock *et al.*, 2008; 2011a), which reported far higher rates of exiting (57%) at the first point of follow up, following a one-year period.
- Those who had exited by Phase 2 of the study were living in either private rented accommodation (n = 4) or local authority housing (n = 2).

Implications for Housing First for Youth

- Internationally, the research evidence base on Housing First for youth is not well developed compared to Housing First for adults.
- Models of accommodation for youth that fall under the Housing First 'umbrella' take different forms and include transitional housing models in some jurisdictions, including Ireland.
- Models of housing with a strong supported dimension—including congregate sites where young people share living spaces—have been suggested as appropriate for some young people, particularly those with high support needs.
- Equally, scattered site Housing First models have been demonstrated to be successful and cost-effective in retaining young people in housing.
- There is therefore every reason to believe that many young people who experience homelessness will have success in moving *directly* to independent housing.
- Models of Housing First for youth need to be subjected to rigorous evaluation to assess housing sustainment as well as indicators of health and well-being, cost effectiveness and client satisfaction.

Unsustained Exits from Homelessness

- A considerable number of the study's young people had exited homelessness at some point over the course of the study but subsequently returned to homeless service settings, pointing to clear problems related to the *sustainability* of homeless exits.
- Many young people who left the homeless service sector and entered into independent living situations (typically in the private rented sector) did not receive adequate or, in some cases, any follow-on support.

Implications for Post-homelessness Support

- Solutions to youth homelessness must extend beyond young people moving into housing and most will need support beyond the point of exiting the service system.
- While some young people may only need assistance for a short time, others will require sustained, intensive support if they are to successfully maintain independent housing.

Patterns of Ongoing and Unresolved Homelessness

- The extent to which young people reported 'houselessness', 'rooflessness', 'insecure' and 'inadequate' housing by Phase 2 of the study, all of which constitute homelessness according to ETHOS, is significant and points to acute challenges and problems with securing apropriate housing for young people who experience homelessness.
- Those young people who were 'houseless' (n = 12) were, in the main, accessing homelessness services in the form of STAs, ETAs and B&B accommodation.
- Those living in 'insecure' and 'inadequate' housing (n = 9) were essentially concealed from the service system and not counted as homeless. All were at risk of re-entering the homeless service system.

Implications for Preventing Patterns of Repeat Homelessness

- Tertiary level preventive strategies—which target individuals already affected by homelessness and at risk of repeat homelessness—are essential if patterns of recurring homelessness are to be prevented.
- When young people re-enter the homeless service sector, their situations and the reasons for their recurrent homelessness need to be fully assessed.

Facilitators to Exiting Homelessness

- Family support emerged as an important enabler to young people as they transitioned out of homelessness services.
- Irrespective of where young people were living, sustained family contact and improved family relationships provided an important safety net at particular points of need.
- Professional supports helped young people to navigate the private rented sector and to access various welfare supports.
- Exiting homelessness was a *process* characterised by multiple transitions—in relation to peers, family, engagement with education/training and employment, and so on—not simply an 'event' marking a definitive or (necessarily) lasting resolution to young people's homelessness.

Implications for Enhancing Support Structures that Promote Homeless Exits

- When young people enter into the homeless service sector, tailored interventions—that are multi-faceted and developed in consultation with young people—need to be put in place at the earliest possible juncture.
- Family reconnection programmes must be seen as a central component of a systems-based approach to resolving youth homelessness.
- Systems-based approaches must also attend to assisting young people into education, training and employment and address any problems related to substance use, mental health and/or other issues (for example, pregnancy, parenthood) affecting their lives.

*Barriers to Exiting Homelessness and
Threats to Housing Stability*

- A lack of affordable, appropriate housing was the single most significant barrier to young people exiting homelessness.
- Problems associated with an unaffordable rental market were exacerbated by the poor standard of more affordable rental properties, the restrictive rent supplement payments available to young people and refusals on the part of landlords to accept tenants in receipt of rent subsidy.
- Young people were typically entering housing at the lowest end of the quality spectrum. This meant that, while many had accessed housing, sometimes on a number of separate occasions, they did not in fact experience housing stability.
- The challenge of ongoing substance use problems and/or mental health difficulties was significant for a large number and acted as a barrier to housing access and sustainability.

*Implications for Preventing and Interrupting Long-term Homeless
Trajectories*

- The longer the duration of homelessness, the more challenging it becomes to exit and sucessfully sustain an exit from homelessness. It follows that young people who remain in the homeless service system for longer will need sustained and intensive support if they are to successfully carve a route to independent housing.

- Secure housing—alongside the provision of additional services and supports as needed—must be seen as an essential first step in the resolution of their homelessness.
- The development and expansion of housing models and options for homeless young people—including Housing First approaches—requires urgent attention. All housing programmes targeting youth must be subjected to rigorous evaluation.

Introduction

This publication presents the findings of a qualitative longitudinal study of homeless young people in Ireland. Initiated in 2013, the research sought to 'track' or follow homeless youth over time in order to more fully understand their trajectories through and possibly out of homelessness. In keeping with the methodological principles of qualitative longitudinal research—and the priority afforded to process as well as outcomes—the study aimed to examine transition and change in the lives of the study's participants. A core objective was to provide a dynamic picture of youth homelessness and to examine the range of experiences that impact young people's lives and the contexts in which change transpires with the passing of time. The research also includes the views and perspectives of a family member of a proportion of the young people who agreed to participate in the study.

The first wave of data collection was undertaken between May 2013 and January 2014, when 40 young people were recruited from several statutory and non-statutory agencies in Dublin and Cork (Phase 1). During Phase 1, a family member of 10 of the study's participating young people (including five mothers and five siblings) was also interviewed in-depth. The findings arising from this baseline phase of the research were published in November 2014 (Mayock *et al.*, 2014). In mid-2015, the process of 'tracking' and re-interviewing study participants was initiated and data collection for the follow-up phase of the study (Phase 2) was conducted between July 2015 and April 2016.

The published findings of the first phase of the research (Mayock *et al.*, 2014) provided a detailed analysis of the young people's paths out of home, their pathways into and through homelessness services and their family situations and relationships; they also examined young people's experiences of seeking a 'way out' of homelessness. While these findings offer numerous important insights into the lives and experiences of the study's young people, they are based on cross-sectional data and do not permit a prospective analysis of unfolding events, circumstances and experiences. This in turn constrains understanding of the factors and experiences that facilitate, or, alternatively, act as barriers to, housing stability over time.

The findings documented in this publication are based on a detailed analysis of longitudinal data generated from two waves of data collection (including the baseline and follow-up phases of the research). They provide a nuanced exploration of how and why change occurred in the young people's lives—in relation to homelessness, housing, education/employment, family relationships, and so on—over the course of the study. Young people's interactions with services, service providers and the housing market and their perspectives on their situations, past and present, are examined, as are their perspectives on transition and change in their homelessness/housing situations. The presentation of data is based on a longitudinal analysis of each participant or case, following individual trajectories and identifying key life events, critical moments, relationships and experiences that effected change through and across time.

The report starts by reviewing the research evidence on young people's routes through and out of homelessness, paying particular attention to the determinants of housing stability and the factors and processes that support exits to independent living situations. Chapter 2 outlines the study's methodological approach and details the recruitment and tracking strategies, data collection methods and data analysis procedures. Chapter 3, the first of five findings chapters, presents a detailed sample profile. In Chapter 4, the homelessness and housing paths of the study's young people are examined in depth and this is followed, in Chapter 5, by an examination of the non-housing transitions to emerge from the young people's accounts over the course of the study. Chapter 6 examines young people's attempts to negotiate a route to housing, highlighting the factors and experiences that facilitated an exit from homelessness. This chapter also documents young people's experiences *in* housing and the move to independent living. Chapter 7 builds upon this analysis, focusing first on structural barriers to housing stability. It then examines young people's interactions with homelessness and other service sectors and concludes by highlighting the extent to which young people resorted to situations of 'hidden' homelessness, often in an attempt to escape hostel life. Chapter 8 draws conclusions, highlighting a number of key messages and implications for policy and service provision arising from the research.

Chapter 1: Homeless Young People's Routes To Housing Stability

This chapter examines the research evidence on young people's routes through and out of homelessness, paying particular attention to those factors and processes that support exits to more secure living situations. It also considers the transition from homelessness to housing, highlighting the significant challenges that young people may face as they navigate a path to residential stability and adjust to becoming housed. The chapter then briefly outlines key policy responses to youth homelessness in Ireland and concludes by considering current debates on Housing First for young people.

The Nature and 'Shape' of Homeless Trajectories

Particularly in North America, and increasingly in countries throughout Europe, the condition of homelessness among adults has been demonstrated to be much more likely to be episodic or short-term, rather than a persistent or lasting experience that results in trajectories of chronic homelessness. Kuhn and Culhane's (1998) analysis was one of the first to show that long-term homelessness affected only a minority of those who ever experienced housing instability and homelessness. This research identified three clear patterns of homelessness—transitional, episodic and chronic—based on the shelter use patterns of over 72,000 homeless individuals in New York City and Philadelphia. The *transitionally* homeless—those who generally entered the shelter system for only one stay and for a short period—accounted for approximately 80% of shelter users in both cities. The *episodically* homeless, then, frequently moved in and out of homelessness and represented approximately 10% of shelter users while the *chronically* homeless—again comprising 10% –were likely to be "entrenched in the shelter system" and using shelters "more like long-term housing" (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998: 210–11). By using longitudinal data, Kuhn and Culhane (1998) demonstrated that the frequently taken-for-granted perception of homelessness as ongoing and persistent was in fact erroneous and that, instead, a majority of individuals exit homelessness to stable housing relatively quickly.

Other US-based research has since confirmed that homelessness is far more likely to be short-term or episodic than persistent and long-term (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010, 2012; Metraux *et al.*, 2001; Canton *et al.*, 2005; Kertesz *et al.*, 2005) and similar findings are beginning to emerge from longitudinal analyses elsewhere, including in Canada and Denmark (Aubry *et al.*, 2013; Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015). In the UK and Ireland, there is also evidence of the presence of relatively small, high-needs, long-term homeless populations, with a far greater proportion of individuals experiencing homelessness for short periods or episodically (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2008; Jones and Pleace, 2010; Lomax and Netto, 2007).

Thus, in both North America and Europe, research has begun to examine homelessness *longitudinally* in order to cast light on the dynamics of homelessness, including those conditions that promote homeless exits and those that produce trajectories of long-term homeless states. Research that seeks to identify facilitators and barriers to individuals exiting homelessness is critical since it can inform policies and service provision that work to ensure that stability of housing is achieved at the earliest possible juncture.

Young People's Paths Out of Homelessness

Relative to the large body of work examining risk factors for—or determinants of—youth homelessness, far fewer studies have investigated the paths taken by young people out of homelessness. Nonetheless, during the past decade in particular, research has focused to a far greater extent than previously on predictors of residential stability among homeless youth and young adults, providing important insight into those factors and experiences that facilitate or, alternatively, act as a barrier to housing stability. Adopting a longitudinal approach, these studies have significantly bolstered understanding of the determinants of housing stability among homeless young people and have also helped to shed light on the dynamics at work as they attempt to navigate a route to stable housing.

There is mounting evidence to suggest that the transition time from homelessness to housing can be relatively short for young people. For example, based on data collected between 2000 and 2002, Milburn *et al.* (2007, 2009) examined the likelihood of adolescents exiting homelessness based on a two-year longitudinal study of newly homeless adolescents in Los Angeles and Melbourne. In the Los Angeles site, 48% of adolescents exited homelessness by three months and remained in stable housing for

the duration of the study (that is, over two years); 49% cycled in and out of homelessness while just 4% remained homeless throughout the study period. Although recorded exits from homelessness were lower among young people in Melbourne, the authors concluded that "newly homeless youth return to home at high rates and often stay home for long periods" (Milburn *et al.*, 2007: 575). Males and females were found to have returned home at similar rates while, at both sites, older youth were significantly less likely to return home.

High rates of returns to stable housing have been reported in a more recent US-based study that examined the course and risk factors for homelessness in a sample of 243 homeless adolescents, aged 12.7 to 17.9 years, followed over a seven-year period. The findings of this research indicated that 57% of the study's participants began 30 consecutive days of housing within the first two weeks after their baseline interview while an additional 10% (totalling 67%) initiated a 30-day run of consecutive days housed within one month (Braciszewski *et al.*, 2016). Returning home was the most frequent outcome among those who experienced consecutive days of housing, "with approximately two thirds of participants back in their parents' homes at the beginning of their string of housed days" (Braciszewski *el al.*, 2016: 362). This study's longitudinal data further indicated that once housing was secured, it tended to remain stable for as long as a one-year period, in many cases. While the authors were careful to point out that this latter finding did not imply that the housing attained by youth was of excellent quality, the results do nonetheless suggest some degree of housing satisfaction given that a large proportion of participants were able to retain housing for at least one year.

Studies such as these, based on data generated from relatively large samples of homeless youth 'followed' over time, strongly suggest that housing stability is an attainable goal for many young people who experience homelessness and one that *can* be achieved relatively quickly. This finding is encouraging and also highlights the limitations of cross-sectional or single point-in-time research, which can exaggerate the severity of homelessness and over-represent those who experience long-term homelessness (Anderson and Christian, 2003; Snow *et al.*, 1994).

Determinants of Housing Stability

As well as identifying the destinations of youth who experience homelessness and the likelihood of their exiting to stable housing over time, studies have examined factors that support an exit from homelessness. An emerging, relatively consistent finding arising from this body of research is that social support, particularly family support, plays a significant enabling role. For example, in Australia, Milburn *et al.* (2009) found support for the Risk Amplification and Abatement Model (RAAM)—the notion that negative contact with socialising agents amplifies risk, while positive contact with socialising agents abates risk—in an assessment of factors associated with newly homeless adolescents exiting homelessness over time. Embeddedness in networks of peers that were supportive of engagement with school and family life was found to support homeless exits. Furthermore, adolescents with more maternal social support at baseline and increasing support over time, were "more likely to exit at two years and to exhibit stable exiting over two years" (Milburn *et al.*, 2009: 12).

Connections to broader social systems (social stability), in the form of days spent in education and employment, has also been found to predict change in homelessness among youth. In a sample of street living youth in the US, Slesnick *et al.* (2008) found that young people with greater levels of connectedness to these social systems were more likely to decrease the number of days spent homeless over a six-month period. Mirroring a somewhat similar emphasis on the positive role of social and family supports, Tevendale *et al.* (2011) found that being able to go home and having not left of one's own accord predicted greater likelihood of membership of a short-term versus long-term inconsistently sheltered trajectory in a sample of 426 youth, aged 14–24 years, receiving services at homeless youth agencies in Los Angeles. This study also found that younger age, having been homeless for less than one year, not using drugs other than alcohol or marijuana and less involvement in informal sector activities predicted greater stability of housing over a two-year period.

More recently, research in both Canada and the US has highlighted the role of factors related to opportunities to promote social integration as increasing the chance of youth finding residential stability. In Montreal, based on longitudinal data collected over a three-year period, Roy *et al.* (2016) found that young people (aged 18–25 years) who had a high school degree, formal sector activity and had sought psychological help, were more likely to achieve residential stability. Efforts to prevent chronic homeless-

ness among youth, the authors suggested, "should not only target individual impairments but also build on services that foster social connections among youth" (Roy *et al.*, 2016: 7). Also drawing attention to the enabling role of supportive relationships, in the US, Braciszewski *et al.*'s (2016) longitudinal study of 243 homeless adolescents concluded that family reunification strategies and tailored family-based interventions have the potential to promote housing stability among youth experiencing homelessness.

Apart from factors related to social support/stability and opportunities to promote social integration, there is some evidence of differences in the experience of young women and young men, suggesting that gender can influence the probability of youth achieving housing stability. Roy *et al.* (2016) found that being female predicted a greater likelihood of attaining a first episode of stability, while Tevendale *et al.* (2011) showed that females were more likely than males to follow 'consistently sheltered' and 'short term inconsistently sheltered' trajectories as opposed to 'long term inconsistently sheltered' trajectories. Being female also emerged as a clear enabler to exiting homelessness in a qualitative longitudinal study of homeless youth in Ireland (Mayock *et al.*, 2008; Mayock *et al.*, 2011a; Mayock and Corr, 2013). The young women in this study were more likely to exit homelessness and to do so speedily; they were also far less likely than their male counterparts to have embarked on a cycle of repeated entry to emergency hostel accommodation and detention in juvenile or adult criminal justice systems.

Several studies have identified a negative association between high intensity substance use and transitions out of homelessness (Cheng *et al.*, 2013; Roy *et al.*, 2011, 2016). While the methods and findings of these studies vary considerably, a consistent finding is that drug and alcohol abuse predicts fewer days housed relative to days homeless (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2007; Slesnick *et al.*, 2008; Tevendale *et al.*, 2011; Roy *et al.*, 2014). Conversely, residential stability has been linked with decreased alcohol and polydrug consumption (Roy *et al.*, 2011). Finally, and importantly, difficulty accessing housing has been demonstrated to be negatively associated with transitions out of homelessness (Kidd *et al.*, 2016; Marr, 2012), with housing availability claimed to be a "key driver of youth homelessness rather than individual behaviour" (Cheng *et al.*, 2013: 124). Other structural barriers to youth exiting homelessness include limited employment opportunities, challenges in obtaining welfare benefits and uncertainties about how to access and engage with education and employment resources (Cheng *et al.*, 2013; Kidd *et al.*, 2016).

The Process of Exiting Homelessness

Qualitative longitudinal studies of homeless youth, as well as research that has included a qualitative component within mixed methods study designs, have yielded considerable insight into the *experiences* of young people as they negotiate a route through and out of homelessness. These studies typically involve detailed analyses of rich narrative data collected from smaller samples of homeless youth, placing a strong emphasis on the *process* of exiting.

The paths followed by young people out of homelessness have been categorised differently in the research literature. For example, in Australia, based on a subgroup of 40 newly homeless young people selected from a larger sample of 165 who had been living away from a parent or guardian for less than six months, Mallet *et al.* (2010) examined the pathways followed by them into and through homelessness over a two-year period. This study constructed four pathways based on the *type of accommodation* (whether they were homeless or housed) and *how long* (stability) they had been in this accommodation. These pathways were categorised as 'on the streets' or street-based homelessness, 'using the system' or service-based homelessness, 'unstably housed' or in and out of homelessness, and 'going home' or stably housed. Over half (n = 22) of the young people interviewed had either returned to the family home or entered into another form of stable housing at the time of follow-up (the 'going home' pathway). The young people in this pathway had been homeless for shorter periods of time compared to youth in the other three pathways, suggesting that the longer the duration of homelessness, the more difficult it becomes to return to stable housing.

In the Irish context, young people's homeless and housing pathways have been examined longitudinally based on the conduct of biographical interviews with a sample of 40 young people 'tracked' over a six-year period (Mayock and O'Sullivan, 2007; Mayock *et al.*, 2008, 2011a; Mayock and Corr, 2013). The study was initiated in 2004–5 when baseline interviews (Phase 1) were conducted; two follow-up phases of data collection were subsequently undertaken in 2005–6 (Phase 2) and 2009–10 (Phase 3), respectively. The pathways identified in this research were associated with a pattern of *continued homelessness* or, alternatively, with *homeless exits*, with the latter categorised as either dependent or independent exits from homelessness at both follow-up phases of the research. Those who exited in an independent sense had either moved home or were living in private

rented sector accommodation and were categorised in this way to reflect their relative independence from State-subsidised housing or other non-statutory interventions (although private rented sector occupants were almost always receiving rent subsidy payments). This distinguished them from those who made dependent exits to transitional housing or to State care, where there was ongoing professional social service input and support. By Phase 2 of the study, following a time lapse of one year, more than half of the young people had exited homelessness in either a dependent or independent sense. Significantly, however, this picture had not changed radically by Phase 3—conducted three years later—in that a majority of young people who had *not* exited by Phase 2 remained homeless. Conversely, a large number of the young people who had exited by Phase 3 of the study had already done so by Phase 2. Similar to the work of Mallet *et al.* (2010), these findings strongly suggest that the duration of young people's homelessness significantly impacted the likelihood of a transition to stable housing, thus highlighting the critical importance of speedy exits from homelessness. Those young people who remained homeless by Phase 3 of the study were primarily young men who had first experienced homelessness during their early or mid-teenage years and subsequently embarked on an 'institutional circuit', moving between homeless hostels and other highly unstable living situations, interspersed—in a majority of cases—by periods of incarceration.

Echoing the findings of several larger-scale quantitative studies (Braciszewski *et al.*, 2016; Milburn *et al.*, 2007, 2009; Roy *et al.*, 2016; Tevendale *et al.*, 2011), both cross-sectional and longitudinal qualitative research has highlighted the role of social supports, particularly family support, in facilitating youth to exit homelessness (MacKnee and Mervyn, 2002; Mallet *et al.*, 2010; Mayock *et al.*, 2011b; Mayock and Corr, 2013; Nebbitt *et al.*, 2007; Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004). These studies have revealed the benefits that youth derive from reconnecting with family members and have also demonstrated the positive impact of family reunification. The process of resolving past tensions can be challenging for youth and has been described as an "incremental and demanding" process (Mayock *et al.*, 2011b: 396), requiring "time and considerable negotiation" (Mayock *et al.*, 2014: 127). Importantly, even if young people cannot return home—which many recognise is not possible or even desirable—they value family connectedness and benefit from renewed and improved contact with family members (Mayock *et al.*, 2014). A number of studies have emphasised

that service engagement and professional supports play an important role in enabling youth to reconnect with family and in supporting them to negotiate a route to stable housing (Garrett *et al.*, 2008; MacKnee and Mervyn, 2002; Mayock *et al.*, 2011b; Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004).

Perhaps the most significant contribution of qualitative analyses of youth exiting homelessness is the emphasis that many of these studies place on the *intersection* of multiple dimensions of experience in enabling youth to carve a path out of homelessness. Detailed analyses of youth narratives— often based on longitudinal data—have revealed that exits to stable housing typically transpire alongside transitions beyond those associated with housing, *per se*. Access to safe, appropriate housing is clearly critical but, equally, many of these studies have uncovered a range of other processes and developments—including dissociation from street peers; engagement with education, training or employment; and seeking out and engaging with professional support systems (Karabanow, 2008; Kidd *et al.*, 2016; Mayock and Corr, 2013; Mayock *et al.*, 2011a; Nebbit *et al.*, 2007)—as bolstering young people's chances of exiting homelessness. Reducing or eliminating substance use has also been found to facilitate young people's ability to access and sustain housing (Garret *et al.*, 2013; Mayock and Corr, 2013). A clear message arising from several studies is that negotiating a route out of homelessness can be a long and challenging path for many young people as they struggle with past traumas and related mental health impacts (Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004; Karabanow *et al.*, 2016; Kidd *et al.*, 2016; Mayock and Corr, 2013), suggesting that tailored professional supports— including housing, health and broader social service interventions—are critical if youth are to successfully exit homelessness and sustain housing.

The Transition from Homelessness to Housing

Alongside the greater emphasis placed within homelessness research on the identification of routes and facilitators to young people exiting homelessness, research has turned attention to how young people experience the *transition to housing*, often based on qualitative or mixed methods longitudinal research approaches. Stability of housing might be expected to confer a strong sense of permanency among youth and to, in turn, support community reintegration. Indeed, achieving stability of housing has been demonstrated to engender feelings of empowerment, personal achievement and pride (Fagguria, 2011; Mayock and Corr, 2013) and a sense of being 'in control' and 'having direction' in one's life (Karabanow, 2008). When

young people transition to (more) stable housing, it enables them to shift from the status of 'other' and homeless, to establish a home and make plans for the future (Manzo, 2003; Robinson, 2002). Stability of housing also provides a vehicle for gaining independence and an escape from negative pasts (Brueckner *et al.*, 2011). Nonetheless, a growing body of research has documented the significant challenges that young people can experience following the transition from homelessness to housing. These studies have tended to focus strongly on the experience of residential stability, applying a temporal lens and placing young people's narratives of housing and home centre-stage.

In Canada, Kidd *et al.*'s (2016) mixed methods longitudinal study examined the experiences of homeless youth who successfully transitioned out of homelessness. The study's quantitative measures of well-being during the transition were suggestive of a modest decline over the one-year period of the study, although some indicators suggested a degree of recovery in the second half of the year. Furthermore, behavioural and psychological aspects of community integration declined to a certain degree, while quality of life declined significantly by the eight-month point before returning to baseline in the final evaluation. These findings are significant in that they contrast quite strongly with a trajectory of improved mental health and well-being that might be expected to accompany housing. Further investigation of the transition to stable housing—drawing on the study's qualitative interview data—helped to contextualise and elaborate the study's quantitative findings, with youth narratives revealing "an often demoralizing, long, and cycling process of transition" (Kidd *et al.*, 2016: 211). While young people frequently described initial feelings of optimism following the move to housing, what followed was a protracted journey to a "meaningful and financially independent life for themselves" (p.211). In a separate publication, a more detailed exploration of the paths through which young people in this study transitioned away from homelessness revealed that they struggled with a continued sense of marginalisation following the move to stable housing and faced significant challenges related to budgeting, housing/landlord issues, mental health and the management of peer relationships. Many also feared losing their market rent accommodation or supportive housing units and "continue[d] to describe their current lives in terms of fragility and instability" (Karabanow *et al.*, 2016: 143).

Longitudinal research in Ireland has also revealed the range of challenges and setbacks experienced by at least some young people follow-

ing the attainment of housing. Irrespective of the route taken by them out of homelessness (whether, for example, they moved home, to private rented accommodation or transitioned more gradually from supported to independent housing), the instabilities and risks experienced by young people as they transitioned out of homelessness—and the adaptations required to sustain housing—were numerous (Mayock and Corr, 2013). Low income, and young people's continued reliance on welfare benefits, meant that they were susceptible to financial stress and also created vulnerability to the accrual of rent arrears and the loss of housing. Reports of loneliness and social isolation following the transition to stable housing were commonplace. Significantly, a considerable number reported high levels of movement between living situations as well as temporary returns to homelessness, in some cases, leading the authors to conclude that "the exiting process was an incremental one, characterised by transition and change as young people adjusted to being housed and attempted to make a 'new life'" (Mayock and Corr, 2013: 59). Research exploring the lives of homeless young people in Canberra, Australia, has similarly illustrated that the move to housing did not always mark an end to homelessness or instability and that those young people who did transition to stable housing continued to feel insecure and faced significant day-to-day challenges to maintaining their housing. The experience of homelessness itself continued to affect the lives of young people subsequent to securing housing and, for some, the transition to independent living was "ironically unsettling" (Barker, 2016: 675).

These studies have demonstrated that while access to housing is a crucial and essential first step to exiting homelessness, it may not be sufficient in and of itself to support a successful and sustained transition out of homelessness. This finding has clear implications for policy and service provision, highlighting, in particular, the importance of providing support beyond the point when young people exit the homeless service system. As Kidd *et al.*, (2016: 216) put it, "enhanced consideration is needed of the post-homelessness support that many of these young people require as they grapple with the daunting task of building a mainstream life".

Policy Responses to Youth Homelessness in Ireland

A detailed overview of policy responses to youth homelessness in Ireland has been previously documented by Mayock *et al.* (2014). The legal definition of 'child' (versus 'adult') is central to understanding policy and service responses to youth homelessness in Ireland (Mayock *et al.*, 2014). This bureaucratic divide essentially means that there are two quite distinct and separate systems charged with intervening in the lives of the under- and over-18 years, respectively. The former—those legally classified as 'children'—are responded to within a child welfare framework. Table 1 summarises the key legislative and policy responses to young homeless people under the age of 18 years. Developments related to the provision of aftercare for young people leaving State care are included since they signal a noteworthy policy response to the well-documented link between histories of State care and the risk of homelessness.[1]

In the Dublin region, an 'out of home' or homeless young person must report to a Garda station and declare him or herself as homeless in order to access accommodation and other services. The Gardaí then make contact with the Out of Hours (Crisis Intervention) Service, which was established in 1992 (see Table 1), and a social worker attends to ascertain whether it is possible for the young person to return home. In cases where a return home is not possible, the young person is placed in Out of Hours Service (OHS) emergency accommodation. The destinations of young people following first contact with the OHS vary, with some returning home and others placed in residential or foster care placements, supported lodgings or in semi-independent living situations.

On reaching the age of 18 years, young people who are 'out of home' or homeless transfer to adult systems of intervention, that is, to adult homeless hostels, Emergency Temporary Accommodation (ETA), Supported Temporary Accommodation (STA) or to B&B accommodation. There are a number of STAs designated for youth aged 18–25 or 26 years in the Dublin region but these interventions are limited in number. The official maximum stay period in an STA is six months but there is evidence that young people spend far longer in these settings because of the lack of 'move on' options and the challenges associated with accessing alternative appropriate and stable accommodation (Mayock *et al.*, 2014).

1 An association between histories of State care and youth homelessness has been consistently documented by research in Ireland (Kelleher *et al.*, 2000; Mayock and Vekić, 2006; Mayock and Carr, 2008; Mayock and O'Sullivan, 2007).

Table 1.1: Summary of Key Legislative and Policy Responses to Youth (under the age of 18 years) Homelessness in Ireland

1985: Publication of *In Partnership with Youth* (Government of Ireland, 1985). The publication of *In Partnership with Youth* in 1985 marked the first clear recognition by the State of youth homelessness as an area distinct from adult homelessness and requiring specific attention: *"The Government accept that it is the responsibility of the Health Boards to provide long-term and short-stay accommodation for homeless young people incapable of independent living and in need of special care"* (Government of Ireland, 1985: 34–34).
1991: *Child Care Act, 1991*. Under Section 5 of the *Child Care Act 1991* Health Boards were made statutorily responsible for the provision of suitable accommodation for children up to the age of 18 years who are homeless and in need of care. Section 45 of the Act empowered former Health Boards (renamed Health Service Executive (HSE) areas in 2005) to provide aftercare support for children in their care, stating that the health board may assist a person leaving its care up to the age of 21 years or until he or she has completed their education or training.
1992: Establishment of Crisis Intervention Service in Dublin. The Crisis Intervention Service, most commonly referred to as the Out of Hours Service, was established in Dublin in 1992. The service, which became the initial point of contact for many young people who experience homelessness, operates within a child welfare framework. It is a social work rather than a specific accommodation service, although much of its remit relates to 'out of home' young people.
2001: Publication of the *Youth Homelessness Strategy* (Department of Health and Children, 2001). The *Youth Homelessness Strategy* provided a framework for tackling youth homelessness on a national level for the first time. The Strategy's stated goal was: *"to reduce and if possible eliminate youth homelessness through preventative strategies and where a child becomes homeless to ensure that he/she benefits from a comprehensive range of services aimed at re-integrating him/her into his/her community as quickly as possible"* (Department of Health and Children, 2001: 3).

2012: *Publication of Leaving and Aftercare Services: National Policy and Procedure* (HSE, 2012).

This document signalled a strong commitment to *"delivering and implementing a leaving and aftercare service for young people which is responsive and relevant to each young person's circumstance"* (Health Service Executive (HSE), 2012: 3).

2013: *Publication of the Review of the Youth Homelessness Strategy* (Denyer *et al.*, 2013).

July 10th, 2013: Twelve years following the publication of the Youth Homelessness Strategy, the first review of the Strategy was launched.

2013: Announcement by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs that legislative provision for aftercare is to be strengthened.

November 6th, 2013: Announcement by Minister Frances Fitzgerald that the Government had approved a proposal to strengthen the legislative provision for aftercare by amending the *Child Care Act 1991* to provide for a statutory right to an aftercare plan.

2014: Establishment by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, of interagency aftercare committees at local level.

These committees were to bring together local authorities, HSE and other statutory agencies to develop interagency wraparound aftercare plans for young people, particularly for those with complex needs, including housing requirements.

September 2015: Publication of *Guidance Document for the Implementation of the Standardised Aftercare Allowance*.

Published by Tusla, The Child and Family Agency, this document introduced a standardised national aftercare allowance of €300 per week for young people who have been in care for 12 months on their 16th birthday or for 12 consecutive months prior to their 18th birthday.

December 2015: *Child Care (Amendment) Act, 2015*.

The Child and Family Agency, Tusla, now has a statutory obligation to ensure that eligible young people leaving State care have an aftercare plan.

Source: Mayock *et al.* (2014), with relevant updated information provided.

Responses to adult homelessness in Ireland during the past decade or more have been characterised by the publication of multiple strategies aimed, in large part, at eliminating long-term homelessness.[2] The *Homelessness Policy Statement* (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2013), launched by the then Minister for Housing and Planning, Jan O'Sullivan, promised to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. This pledge was made five years previously in *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland, 2008–2013* (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2008: 29), which undertook to end long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough by 2010. However, what distinguished the *Homelessness Policy Statement* from previous policy documents and strategic plans was that it outlined a commitment to implementing a 'housing-led' approach (O'Sullivan, 2012: 2):

> The Programme for Government contains a commitment to ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by implementing a housing-led approach. This approach recognises that long-term secure housing is the best outcome for people affected by homelessness. By moving away from expensive emergency or shelter type accommodation better use can be made of scarce resources.

The rapid provision of appropriate housing, with support as required, to ensure sustainable tenancies, was the key solution proposed to ending homelessness. This document did refer briefly to youth homelessness, asserting that "the approach to tackling all forms of homelessness—child, youth and adult homelessness should be fully integrated" (p. 4). However, the manner in which this "integrated" aim might be achieved was not elaborated (Mayock *et al.*, 2014). Like previous policy documents, with the exception of the *Homeless Preventative Strategy* (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002)[3], the *Homelessness Policy Statement* did not identify homeless young people as having distinct needs, despite clear evidence that their routes to homelessness differ from those typically taken by older adults and families (Gaetz, 2014a; Mayock and O'Sullivan, 2007).

2 For a detailed account of the evolution of policy response to adult homelessness in Ireland, see O'Sullivan (2008, 2012, 2016).

3 The *Homeless Preventative Strategy* addressed the prevention of homelessness with specific attention to a number of 'at risk' groups, including adult and young offenders, people leaving mental health residential facilities, people leaving acute hospitals, and young people leaving care. A key objective of the Strategy was to ensure that "no one is released or discharged from State care without the appropriate measures in place to ensure that they have a suitable place to live with the necessary supports, if needed" (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002:3).

Shortly after the publication of the *Homelessness Policy Statement,* a three-person Homelessness Oversight Group was established to assess and monitor progress. In December 2013, it published a report and concluded that progress with fulfilling the aims of a 'housing-led' approach had been slow. A deficit in the supply of appropriate accommodation for homeless individuals, particularly in the Dublin region, was identified as a core obstacle to progress; furthermore, the limited availability of both housing and support services for those who are homeless was deemed a significant barrier to progressing and implementing a 'housing-led' approach. The Oversight Group did, however, deem the aim of eliminating long-term homelessness by the end of 2016 to be 'attainable' (Homelessness Oversight Group, 2013).

The period from mid-2014 to the present has seen a steady and unprecedented rise in the number of adults accessing homelessness services, with the number of adults presenting with dependent children being a key feature of this increase (Walsh and Harvey, 2015). While, in June 2014, 364 families (with 567 dependent children) were homeless in Dublin, this figure had risen to 1,028 (with 2,096 dependent children) in December 2016 (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2016; Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE), 2016). By December 2016, more than three-quarters of all homeless families in the Dublin region were being accommodated in commercial hotels (DRHE, 2016).

Responses to this 'crisis' of family homelessness saw the publication of another suite of Government reports, plans and strategies (see O'Sullivan, 2016 for a detailed account), the most recent being the *Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*, titled 'Rebuilding Ireland' (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2016), published in July 2016. Unlike the 2008 and 2013 strategies, this Action Plan did not articulate a commitment to ending long-term homelessness and, instead, promised to significantly reduce the use of commercial hotels for accommodating homeless families by mid-2017.[4] The Plan promised to increase the number of Housing First tenancies in Dublin to 300 by 2017, to increase the amount of rent subsidy available to homeless households

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4 According to the Action Plan (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2016: 13): "By mid-2017, emergency hotel and B&B type accommodation for families will only be used in limited circumstances and will have been largely replaced by suitable permanent family accommodation by delivering additional housing solutions including through an expanded Rapid-Build Housing Programme".

and also committed to providing 47,000 social housing units comprising new builds and the purchasing and leasing of existing units of housing.

Describing the evolution of homelessness policy in Ireland from the period 2013–16—and analysing the failure to achieve the aim of eliminating long-term homelessness—O'Sullivan (2016: 33) drew the following conclusion on the short- to medium-term prospects for Housing First:

> The aspiration to reorient homeless service provision towards a housing-led approach is further from being realised than at any point over the past 30 years. Instead, this paper suggests that despite the raft of action plans and strategies, homelessness will continue to rise in the short-term, particularly amongst families; expenditure on hopeless hostels and bleak B&Bs will consume an increasing share of homelessness budgets; and Housing First will remain marginal in the overall scheme of homelessness provision, despite some rhetorical nods in its direction from some NGOs. This is due to a lack of social housing in the short term, the relentless increase in rents in the private rented market and the plummeting availability of such dwellings, particularly in Dublin.

While this rather pessimistic forecast for the future of Housing First in Ireland certainly appears to chime with the available evidence, Housing First remains a central plank of official homelessness policy. It is important, therefore, to discuss the international research evidence on Housing First *for young people*. First, however, it is useful to summarise the key characteristics of current policy and service responses to youth homelessness in Ireland:

- The bureaucratic (legal) divide between under- and over-18s means that there are two quite distinct approaches to providing services to homeless or 'out of home' young people. This also means that, on reaching the age of legal adulthood, young people transfer automatically to adult systems of intervention.
- The *Child Care (Amendment) Act, 2015* means that The Child and Family Agency, Tusla, now has a statutory obligation to ensure that eligible young people leaving State care have an aftercare plan. This strengthening of the legislative provisions for aftercare should help to reduce the risk of homelessness among young people leaving care.
- Within most adult homelessness policy statements published since 2000, little or no attention has been directed to the specific situations of homeless young people, or their distinct social, developmental, emotional, health and housing needs.
- Services designed specifically to respond to the needs of homeless young people aged 18–25 years are few in number, which means that

young people in this age group frequently have no option but to access adult homeless hostels where they experience high exposure to drug use and other risk behaviour.

- Transitional/supported housing for youth has been phased out, which means that this 'route' out of homelessness to (more) stable housing is no longer available to young people.

- Housing First initiatives and programmes targeting youth are currently limited in number and reach and have not, as yet, been formally evaluated (see following section for further detail).

Housing First for Young People

There is a burgeoning body of evidence, particularly in the US but also in an increasing number of European countries, demonstrating the success of Housing First for adults with high and complex needs, including those who have substance use and/or mental health problems (Aubry *et al.*, 2014; Bretherton and Pleace, 2015; Busch-Geertsema, 2013; Pleace and Bretherton, 2013a; Stefanic and Tsemberis, 2007). Housing First delivers gains in health and well-being and there is also evidence of increases in perceived choice among clients (Edens *et al.*, 2011; Greenwood *et al.*, 2005; Tsemberis *et al.*, 2004). Some studies have demonstrated reduced use of drugs and alcohol despite a more tolerant harm reduction approach (Padgett *et al.*, 2011), while others have not recorded a significant decrease in substance use or psychiatric symptoms among Housing First clients after a period of one year (Pearson *et al.*, 2009). The Housing First Europe project, which involved five test sites (Amsterdam, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow and Lisbon) where the Housing First approach was evaluated, demonstrated high retention rates in four of the five projects. A retention rate of over 90% was reported in Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Glasgow while in Lisbon the retention rate was 80% (Busch-Geertsema, 2013). These extraordinarily high rates of retention, according to Busch-Geertsema (2013: 7), demonstrate "that it is possible to house homeless persons even with the most complex support needs in independent, scattered housing". There is also evidence of success in housing long-term adult homeless individuals using Housing First approaches in Denmak, England, Finland and Ireland (Benjaminsen, 2013; Bretherton and Pleace, 2015; Greenwood, 2015; Pleace and Bretherton, 2013a; Tainio and Fredriksson, 2009).

Housing First is now central to strategic responses to homelessness in many Northern European countries. It is perhaps important to note,

however, that discussion and debate is ongoing about fidelity to Housing First, in particular about the extent to which some Housing First models 'drift' from the original New York *Pathways to Housing* approach and whether this 'drift' can undermine or dilute the effectiveness of Housing First (see Pleace, 2011; Pleace and Bretherton, 2013b). The *Pathways to Housing* approach provides re-housing without any prior requirement that high need and chronically homeless people show themselves to be 'housing ready'. Intensive support to sustain their housing and improve their health, well-being and social integration is provided to service users *in their own home* (rather than in congregate sites), and use of that support is something over which service users exercise considerable choice and control (Tsemberis, 2010). Research has shown that Housing First programmes with high fidelity demonstrate better outcomes for their participants in relation to housing stability, community functioning and quality of life (Davidson *et al.*, 2014; Gilmer *et al.*, 2014; Goering *et al.*, 2011).

What is 'Housing First' for Youth?

The research evidence base on Housing First for young people is far less extensive than Housing First for adults. Conversations about the most appropriate programme models for youth experiencing homelessness are ongoing (Dworsky, 2010; Gaetz, 2014b,c; Pope, 2011) and there is, as yet, no clear consensus on what Housing First for youth actually means or how it ought to be operationalised.

Gaetz (2014b: 2) identifies a range of Housing First models of accommodation and support for youth in the Canadian context, including "not only scattered site housing where young people control the lease, but also some forms of transitional housing, permanent supportive housing and, for some young people, moving back home to live with caregivers". Here, transitional housing—the 'step' that most proponents of Housing First models (for adults) insist must be bypassed—is listed as one of a number of models of Housing First for youth. However, when outlining a framework for Housing First for youth, Gaetz (2014b: 2) is clear that the two terms (and models)—transitional housing and Housing First—ought not to be confused, conflated or used interchangeably.

> In an attempt to develop something that meets the needs of young people, the framework developed here in some ways significantly deviates from what we have come to think of as Housing First. It must be acknowledged that there are risks in broadening a concept. The development of this framework should not, and cannot, mean that providers simply rename what they are currently

doing as Housing First, either because of the popularity of the concept, or because of pressure from funders. For instance, not all transitional housing models—indeed, not all independent living programs—fit this framework and as such should not be called Housing First. For a program or philosophy to be legitimately referred to as Housing First, it will be necessary for providers to assure there is fidelity to the core principles, description of housing options, and accompanying services and supports . . .

Several interesting points are raised in the excerpt above about the development of a Housing First framework for youth. However, while "broadening" the Housing First concept is asserted to carry no risks, "fidelity" with the core principles of Housing First is simultaneously heavily emphasised, arguably raising questions about what precisely Housing First for youth encompasses and how it might be delivered in practice.

Transitional/supportive housing models—essentially meaning that young people live in congregate settings for either fixed or flexible periods before moving to independent housing—have been argued to have a legitimate 'place' within a Housing First model for youth (Gaetz, 2014c; Holtschneider, 2016). For example, Holtschneider's (2016) examination of the perceived impact of the housing and support services provided by a transitional living programme on the lives of formerly homeless youth in Chicago, Illinois, documents the importance of 'connection', 'community' and 'preparedness' (for independent living) as central to young people's positive appraisals of the programme. On the basis of the findings, Holtschneider argues strongly for the retention of transitional living programmes "as an essential part of our solution to address youth homelessness" (Holtschneider, 2016: 204). Munson *et al.*'s (2017) analysis of transitional housing for youth and young adults (all homeless, aged 18–25 years and either diagnosed with a serious mental illness and/or ageing out of foster care), is perhaps more nuanced, exposing the mixed messages that youth received about *independence*:

> Participants in numerous ways expressed how they felt like they were living in institutions that were not different from the ones they lived in as children. They described how living in their residence made them feel like an adult and a child at the same time (Munson *et al.*, 2017: 435).

The confused messages that young residents received ought not to be regarded as surprising, according to Munson *et al.* (2017: 435), since the programme under study "had both elements of more traditional housing models and Housing First". Youth in this research struggled with the restrictive and infantilising rules that they were subjected to as residents,

such that "the rhetoric of independence was not matched by the program structure" (Munson *et al.*, 2017: 433). Another recent study of homeless young adults living in a transitional living programme in the US has similarly documented residents' feelings of being overly monitored within the programme due to a lack of flexibility in the rules and regulations governing their daily lives (Curry and Petering, 2017).

With the caveat that the bulk of research on transitional housing for youth is US-based, some studies of transitional living programmes targeting youth suggest *low fidelity* to Housing First, certainly if 'consumer choice'—which acknowledges individuals' right to autonomy and control over their living situations—is viewed as a 'marker' of adherence to a Housing First approach (Tsemberis, 2010).

While discussion and debate about models of housing provision for homeless young people is ongoing and likely to persist for some time, there is broad agreement that homeless young people's housing and support needs are *diverse* and, in some cases, multi-faceted and complex. Irrespective of the stance taken by researchers and commentators on Housing First for youth—or on the 'place' of transitional models of housing *within* Housing First—there is broad agreement that models of housing for young people who experience homelessness must take account of their developmental stage and needs (Gaetz, 2014c; Scott and Harrison, 2013), address both their practical and emotional support needs (Munson *et al.*, 2017), provide (sometimes intensive) housing support tailored to the unique needs of individual young people (Scott and Harrison, 2013), and understand that youths' service preferences may change and evolve over time (Forchuk *et al.*, 2013).

In Ireland, the design and implementation of Housing First approaches for youth is only beginning to emerge. While such models, which include the provision of transitional housing, are currently being implemented in Limerick, Cork and Waterford,[5] they are limited in their scope and scale.

5 These housing services are run by Focus Ireland in partnership with Tusla and/ or relevant Local Authorities and primarily house and support young people with histories of State care (but the services are also open to young people experiencing homelessness without a care background). The Limerick project— the first of these services—opened in May 2013 and caters for young people aged 16–23 years while the Cork project accommodates 18–26 year olds. A scatter-site accommodation model is used in Cork and Limerick while the Waterford service (a residential aftercare service that was reconfigured as a Youth Housing First project) is a congregate site. Focus Ireland also initiated a Dublin Youth Housing Service in 2016.

While an evaluation of the Limerick Youth Housing service has recently been undertaken (Focus Ireland, forthcoming), discussion about the efficacy of different models—and their potential to resolve youth homelessness—has yet to emerge in Ireland. More broadly, Housing First for youth in Ireland is evolving in a rather paradoxical space, characterised by the abolition (phasing out over time) of transitional housing for youth, on the one hand, and the opening up of transitional models of housing under a Housing First 'umbrella', on the other. The apparent ambiguity surrounding the provision of accommodation and 'solutions' to youth homelesssness might be viewed, optimistically, as permitting scope for the development of a range of models of service provision; equally, however, it might be reasonably argued to be an inevitable consequence of a failure within policy to adequately address and attend to the distinct needs—different to those of adults and families—of young people who experience homelessness.

Does 'Housing First' Work for Young People?

Relative to the knowledge base on Housing First for adults, there are few examples of Housing First programmes specifically targeting youth that have been systematically evaluated. One exception is the *Infinity Project*, operated by the Boys and Girls Club of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, which serves young people aged 16–24 years and has been collecting data on outcomes since its establishment in 2009. The goal of *Infinity*, which uses a a scattered site approach and rental market housing (with rent subsidies provided), is to enable youth to become permanently housed through a programme that offers "intensive housing support tailored to meet the unique needs of young people" (Scott and Harrison, 2013: 46). In addition to housing with rent supplements, young people are provided with numerous supports that encourage and facilitate access to education and employment, the development of life skills, and their reconnection with family and other social support systems. Information collected on 48 young people who had been in the programme for a period of one year indicated that 95% remained housed and that a very high proportion (63% of those over 18 years and 87% of those under 18 years) had stable income, either through employment, alternative funding or education and/or employability programmes (Scott and Harrison, 2013). These outcomes, which confirm the programme's success in supporting young people to access and maintain housing, are clearly positive. *Infinity's* financial success was also demonstrated, with the average

cost per day for youth in the first month being $143.94, decreasing to $23.96 per day by month six. This compared to an average daily cost of $82 and $250 to house youth in a shelter or in detention, respectively.

Kozloff *et al.*'s (2016) subgroup analysis of youth with mental illness, aged 18–24 years and participating in At Home/Chez Soi—a randomised control trial of Housing First across five Canadian cities—has also demonstrated the success of Housing First for youth, certainly in terms of housing outcomes. Of the 156 youth included in the analysis, 87 recieved Housing First and 69 received treatment as usual. The findings revealed that youth in Housing First were stably housed for a mean of 437 of 645 (65%) days for which data were available, compared with youth in treatment as usual, who were stably housed for a mean of 189 of 582 (31%) days for which data were available. Housing First also resulted in small but statistically significant improvements in quality of life and community functioning relative to treatment as usual; however, it did not appear to have an effect on other outcomes, including physical and mental health, substance use and criminal justice contact. Kozloff *et al.* (2016: 8, emphasis added) drew the following conclusions:

> It [the study] suggests that *"Housing First" is a viable intervention to promote housing stability in homeless youth with mental illness and is as effective for young people as it is for adults in general* . . . However, given that other outcomes did not appear to respond to the intervention, we suggest considering modifications of "Housing First" to maintain fidelity to core principles while better meeting the needs of youth. This may include attention to issues such such as peer/family relationships, sexual health, education and job skills, culture, life skills, substance use, and crime avoidance, and should engage youth in all stages of implementation and evaluation.

The authors of an early assessment of the *Youth Matters in London* (Ontario) project, which aimed "to investigate and better understand youth participants' *choices* regarding treatment and service options over a three-year period" (Forchuk *et al.*, 2013: 96, emphasis in original), presented a quite different perspective on Housing First for youth. While 40% of this study's participants, aged 16–25 years, articulated a preference for Housing First, not all young people—particularly those with mental health and/or substance use issues—were comfortable with the *independence* that Housing First models provided. On this basis, the authors highlighted the inadequacy of a "one size fits all" approach to young people's treatment and housing needs:

> Considering the diversity of responses and needs of youth in our study it is clear that a "one size fits all" approach to treatment and service provision is not enough. The social, cultural, financial and existential (i.e. the perceived

meaning of one's existence and place in the world, as well as how this meaning may influence the decisions one makes) situations of the study's participants are very different" (Forchuk *et al.*, 2013: 106).

Echoing somewhat similar concerns, Gaetz (2014b: 2) suggests that if Housing First is to work for young people, "it must build upon our understanding of the developmental, social and legal needs of young people". While staircase approaches to housing homeless people have been subjected to strong and, in some cases, severe criticism (Sahlin, 2005; Hansen Loftstrand, 2010), 'stepped' or transitional models may be appropriate for some young people, particularly "for young 16–18 year olds (and sometimes older) young people who often need a supportive environment for a significant period of time before moving to independent living" (Quilgars *et al.*, 2008: 113). Although, as documented earlier, the *Infinity Project's* scattered site Housing First model has delivered high retention rates, Scott and Harrison (2013: 35) also suggest that young people "may need time in a supportive housing context to have the opportunity to practice life skills, such as buying groceries or paying the rent on time, before they can move to more permanent housing". In Ireland, transitions through supported housing, as part of the process of exiting homelessness, have been found to be enabling for at least some young people in the sense of preparing them for the reality and responsibility of independent housing (Mayock and Corr, 2013). The young people in this study who initially achieved housing stability via transitional housing typically moved to independent living situations—most often in the private rented sector—at a later stage and, sometimes, relatively quickly.

As yet, there is no consensus on what precisely Housing First for youth ought to 'look like', which is perhaps unsurprising given that so few models of housing for youth have been empirically tested. What seems clear, however, is that young people who have experienced homelessness will have diverse histories and needs. It follows that their individual situations require careful consideration and that the choices and preferences of young people need to be taken into account in decisions about their housing.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed an emerging body of research on young people's exit routes from homelessness, documenting key determinants of housing stability as well as the processes at work as young people negotiate a route to stable housing. Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods *longitudinal*

studies have yielded a far more robust understanding of those factors and conditions that support trajectories out of homelessness, highlighting the critical importance of 'following' young people beyond the point of becoming homeless in order to more fully understand the dynamics of exiting homelessness. Longitudinal research has also begun to examine homeless young people's experience of housing (stability), highlighting the complex and challenging realities that many may face subsequent to exiting homeless service systems.

Policy responses to youth homelessness in Ireland are structured in accordance with the legal definition of 'child' (versus 'adult'), meaning that there are two quite distinct and separate systems of intervention for homeless young people under and over the age of 18 years, respectively. This bureaucratic divide also means that young people automatically transfer to adult systems of intervention on reaching the age of 18 years. A noteworthy feature of policy responses to adult homelessness is that the specific situations and needs of homeless *young people*—different to those of older adults and families—have not been specifically or comprehensively addressed. Finally, the development of Housing First for youth is in its infancy in Ireland; very few Housing First projects targeting young people have been developed and those that have been established have yet to be formally evaluated. Internationally, Housing First for youth is the subject of ongoing discussion, and debate about the appropriateness and efficacy of different models of Housing First for youth is likely to continue for some time.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

As stated in the introduction, this publication is primarily concerned with documenting the paths followed by young people who experience homelessness based on data garnered from a qualitative longitudinal study that was initiated in 2013. To date, two waves of data collection have been completed, yielding rich narrative data that permits a detailed examination of change and continuity in the young people's lives *over time*. This chapter presents the research aims and outlines the methodological approaches that guided the recruitment, data collection and analysis stages of the study. It discusses the challenges associated with retaining participants in a longitudinal study of this kind and outlines the ethical considerations that informed the conduct of the research.

Research Aims

Central to the research was the aim of investigating the multi-dimensional layers of experience associated with young people becoming, remaining and, possibly, exiting homelessness. A major objective of this qualitative longitudinal study was to generate in-depth knowledge and understanding of the dynamics that impact the housing transitions of young people who experience homelessness and housing instability. With transition and change singled out for analytical attention, the study's participants were interviewed twice (approximately two years apart) with a view to exploring the range of processes (including structural and individual factors) that influence young people's ability to access and maintain housing over time. The key analytical goals of the study were as follows:

1. To trace the flow of events and experiences that impact young people's housing and homelessness trajectories over time.
2. To identify the factors and circumstances that protect young people from entering into prolonged or ongoing homeless 'states' and those that facilitate the transition to stable housing.
3. To identify factors that act as barriers to stable, sustainable housing in the case of young people who experience continued or repeat homelessness.

4. To 'track' young people's family relationships over time and examine the impact of continuity and change in these relationships on their lives.

5. To inform policy directions related to service provision, particularly in relation to housing-led approaches for young people.

Using a Qualitative Longitudinal Lens

Qualitative longitudinal (QL) enquiry is a developing and evolving methodological paradigm (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Thomson and McLeod, 2015) that is particularly suited to investigating the ways in which lives are lived—individually and collectively—in the context of social change (Leisering and Walker, 1998). As Thomson (2011: 3) suggests, QL research enables a methodological approach that acknowledges "the importance of depth, duration and changing perspective to the ways in which we understand the world around us and what becomes framed as 'social problems'". Put differently, temporality is the dynamic lynchpin through which we can begin to understand the flows and contours of *experience* and examine the range of processes—both individual and structural—that shape, and are shaped by, the ways in which lives unfold (Saldaña, 2003; Thomson *et al.*, 2002).

The exploratory power of qualitative diachronic analysis (that is, where phenomena are examined over time) lies in its ability to generate rich, multi-layered and nuanced data that positions biographical themes within broader (and often changing) political and socio-economic contexts. As a result, insights gleaned from the time-sensitive nature of QL research can be particularly useful within the area of social policy planning (Molloy *et al.*, 2002; Farrall, 2006). This is because of its unique ability to explore the subtle interactions between social structure and individual agency and, more specifically, to examine how targeted interventions and social welfare policies are experienced by individuals with the passing of time (Heinz and Krüger, 2001; Corden and Millar, 2007). As Lewis (2007: 555) puts it:

> It is an approach which essentially analyses policies in their real social setting, allowing us to see the dynamic interplay between the individual, service, policy and wider structural domains, and through this to understand the mechanisms and conditions that contribute to, or hinder, outcomes and change.

An in-depth longitudinal approach allows us to 'walk alongside' individuals (McLeod and Thomson, 2009) and to examine how housing trajectories are shaped, often incrementally, by various social processes as well as the ways in which young people and their families understand, attach meaning to, and negotiate the experience of change in their lives.

QL research can therefore contribute to a more holistic understanding of youth homelessness and yield a better-informed analysis of the ways to effectively respond from a policy perspective.

Study Design

Initiated in 2013, Phase 1 of this longitudinal study was designed to examine, in depth, the phenomenon of youth homelessness through the collection of rich, narrative data (Mayock *et al.*, 2014).[1] At baseline, a total of 40 'out of home' young people (25 young men and 15 young women) were recruited over an eight-month period between May 2013 and January 2014. To be eligible for participation in the research, the young people had to be:

1. Aged between 14 and and 24 years;
2. Currently homeless or living in temporary, insecure, or unfit accommodation; or
3. 'At risk' of homelessness by virtue of having experienced housing instability or a previous episode of homelessness.

Young people were recruited from a range of statutory and non-statutory services in Dublin (34 participants) and Cork (6 participants) targeting homeless or 'at risk' youth.[2] The types of services that were used as recruitment sites included: emergency, short-term and supported temporary accommodation (STA) services; crisis intervention services; drop-in/day centres; education, training and employment services; and aftercare services. From the outset, the research aimed to include the views of a family member (for example, a parent, sibling, other relative or carer) of the participating young people in order to more fully understand the complex family dynamics that may serve to push young people out of home, as well as family processes that can facilitate a resolution to their homelessness.[3]

[1] Phase 1 of this research was granted ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee (REC), School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, in 2013. Ethical approval for Phase 2 of the study was granted in October 2015.

[2] See Mayock *et al.* (2014) for a detailed account of the study's approach to access and recruitment during Phase 1.

[3] Within the field of family research in particular, there is increasing recognition of the value of having access to multiple perspectives from the same family unit for the purposes of data triangulation (Perlesz and Lindsay, 2003; Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). This research sought to produce a more nuanced account of the family lives, experiences and relationships of 'out of home' young people, with particular attention to unfolding processes of change over time. See Mayock *et al.* (2014: 42) for a fuller account of the rationale for including family members in the study.

The family 'element' of the research was explained in detail to the young people at baseline and, where appropriate, permission was sought from them to make contact with a nominated member of their family. A total of ten family members (including five mothers and five siblings) were interviewed during the first wave of data collection.

The process of re-establishing contact with young people was initiated in July 2015, approximately two years after they were initially recruited for participation in the study. Direct contact was made with 38 of the 40 respondents and, of these, a total of 29 participated in a follow-up interview, yielding a retention rate of 72.5% for the study's young people. In 5 additional cases, contact was re-established with young people by telephone or by email but it was not possible to arrange a second interview for various reasons, including personal crises (related to, for example, relationship difficulties, breakdown of housing or periods of low mood/ depression) or because of their busy schedules. A number of others were not available for interview because they were incarcerated (n = 1), spending time in a psychiatric hospital (n = 1) or living abroad (n = 2). A small number were unable to be reached because the contact details that they provided at Phase 1 of the study (particularly telephone numbers) were no longer in use. Overall, information pertaining to participants' living situations by the time of Phase 2—verified by at least two individuals such as service professionals and/or another young person—was successfully attained for 9 young people in addition to the 29 who participated in a follow-up interview. Reliable data were therefore available to the research team on the whereabouts of 95% of the baseline sample of young people during the second wave of data collection.

Of the 10 family members who initially took part in Phase 1 of the research, a total of 8 (including 4 parents and 4 siblings) were re-interviewed at Phase 2. The same steps and procedures outlined above (that is, sending emails, phoning mobiles, sending letters, and so on using the contact details acquired at baseline) were used to re-establish contact with the family member participants. This yielded a retention rate of 80% for the study's participating family members.

Overall, the second wave of data collection yielded a total of 37 follow-up interviews with young people (n = 29) and family members (n = 8), which amounts to a retention rate of 74% for the study's participants.

Tracking and Retention

Retaining participants in QL studies of marginalised groups generally, and homeless populations in particular (Conover *et al.*, 1997), can pose significant challenges due to the transient and sometimes chaotic nature of their lives. In order to minimise sample attrition, the following tracking strategies were developed and implemented during Phase 1 with the aim of bolstering the retention rate in subsequent follow-up phases of the research:

1. The participating young people and family members were informed of the longitudinal element of the research at Phase 1 and invited to provide details on where and how they might be contacted in the future (Miller, 2015). With the participants' consent, information was recorded on one or more of the following: their home address/phone number, mobile phone number, email address, social networking sites,[4] and/or the contact details of a friend(s), social worker or family member. Participants were also asked to suggest other possible contact routes such as locations or services they visited on a regular basis.

2. Additional follow-up information about young people's whereabouts was recorded, where appropriate and possible, subsequent to the conduct of baseline interviews. This was achieved by maintaining regular communication with agency contacts, (re)visiting field sites, and (re)engaging with participants and/or their peers in order to record up-to-date information on the participants' living situations.

3. Following the conduct of baseline interviews, participants were contacted intermittently by email and received birthday cards/text messages from the research team. They were also informed about the launch of publications documenting the findings of the research.[5]

4. A study name and logo were developed in consultation with young people in order to strengthen the project's 'identity' and help to maintain participants' interest in the research.

4 Many young people stated that social networking was their preferred means of maintaining contact with the research team (since they often changed location, mobile phone number, or ceased using email addresses).

5 One of the study's young people spoke publicly at the launch of a publication documenting the findings arising from Phase 1 of the research (Mayock *et al.*, 2014) and a small number of other participants and family members also attended this event.

5. In line with increased recognition of the ways in which the internet and social media can assist in maintaining contact with a QL research sample (Convery and Cox, 2012; Miller, 2015; Coughlan and Perryman, 2015), the study created a presence on social networking sites in the hope that this would bolster our efforts to locate and contact the participants in the future.[6]

The process of tracking and re-interviewing the participating young people and family members was incremental and time consuming and extended over a ten-month period from July 2015 to April 2016 (a majority of the follow-up interviews were conducted by December 2015). The first step in seeking to re-establish contact relied on the contact details provided by them during the first wave of data collection. Phone calls were made, emails and letters were sent and respondents were contacted via social media. This process, which centred primarily on establishing direct personal contact with the study's participants, yielded positive results in a considerable number of cases, particularly with the passing of time. Significant also was that new information or 'leads' on the whereabouts of participants were often provided by family members and/or other respondents throughout the data collection stage and this information enabled the research team to initiate contact with young people on a number of occasions.[7] In addition, the research team had established strong relationships with service providers in the homelessness and social work sectors who, in several cases, were able to contact the young people on our behalf and obtain their consent to pass on their contact details.[8]

There were several challenges with retaining participants in the study. These often centred on difficulties associated with simply organising a day/time to conduct the interview; in many instances, participants cancelled their initial appointments, for example. Some young people arrived to the interview hours late while others failed to turn up on the day due to per-

6 Following consultation with experts in the field of information technology, a number of precautionary measures were put in place to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. These measures were adhered to during all efforts to contact participants using this tracking method.

7 The use of snowball sampling techniques during the recruitment stage of Phase 1 proved useful since many of the participants who took part in the first stage of the research were still in touch with each other by the time of Phase 2.

8 This tracking technique—which relies on the support of service professionals—has proven useful in the conduct of previous QL studies of homeless youth (Mayock *et al.* 2008; 2011a; Mayock and Corr, 2013).

sonal crises, illness or other unknown reasons.[9] For these reasons, meetings frequently had to be rescheduled, often on multiple occasions, before a follow-up interview was conducted. The interviews themselves were sometimes interrupted (for example, by young people receiving phone calls) or cut short because they had other personal or work-/training-related commitments to attend to.[10] In such cases, a second date and time was arranged with participants to conclude the follow-up interview.

Detailed record keeping and the maintenance of a contact-log was essential throughout the tracking process and allowed the research team to "build as transparent a picture of the sample as possible and also to guard against coercion" (Miller, 2015: 298). These procedures also enabled the research team to maintain a clear record of those participants who declined to be re-interviewed or could not be tracked and why. The process of tracking and re-interviewing was lengthy and required dedicated persistence in order for the team to strike an ethical balance between the production of "first class research and treating sample members with respect" (Farrall *et al.*, 2015: 297). Importantly, rigid time limits in securing interviews were not imposed (Farrall *et al.,* 2015) nor did the research team give up until all possible routes and leads had been exhausted.

Data Collection Methods

The life history interview was the study's core method of data collection (Atkinson, 1998; Roberts, 2002). A *longitudinal* approach to life history interviewing brings to the fore the question of the subject in process (Plumridge and Thomson, 2003). As Corden and Millar (2007: 529 emphasis added) explain, "having people *look back* over time can provide insight into how they perceive and explain their actions, given the opportunity to discuss and reflect. Following people *forward* over time provides an opportunity to explore how and why people make the individual choices that add up to particular cumulative trajectories". In this sense, QL interviews allowed the research team to 'get beneath the surface' through a strong focus on personal experience, thus permitting an exploration of the respondents' own interpretation and understanding of situations, events and relationships as well as 'turning points' and transition in all areas of their lives.

9 One young person was visibly drug intoxicated when they arrived at the venue where the interview was to take place and that interview had to be rescheduled.

10 A number of young people were either pregnant or had recently become parents and had their children in their care. In these instances, young people were understandably busy and sometimes pre-occupied by the needs of their children.

Life History Interviews with Young People

At baseline, the life history interviews commenced with an invitation to the young people (n = 40) to tell their 'life story'. Following this, several key topics were addressed, including: their narratives of becoming and/or remaining homeless; their housing histories; family and/or peer relationships; experiences of education, training and employment; their substance use (where relevant); physical and mental health; their use of support services; and their perspectives—whether negative or positive—on their situations, past, present and future. During the follow-up interviews, young people were asked to 'update' their life history narratives by detailing significant events that had occurred since Phase 1 in order to identify what had changed in their lives, what had stayed the same (Saldaña, 2003) and their experiences more generally during the intervening period. A diagrammatic 'timeline', which served as a visual aid, was used during the interviews, particularly when probing participants' experiences of housing and homelessness as well as other domains of life experience over the course of the study. This timeline helped young people to reflect on their situations, past and present, as they were asked to describe *changes* in their current social or peer groups, family relationships and any new services that they had accessed. At the end of the interview, all participants were asked what it had been like to participate in the research and how they felt their lives were (or were not) 'different' from when they first entered the study.

In-depth Interviews with Family Members

In keeping with the approach adopted during Phase 1, follow-up in-depth interviews with family members (n = 8) were conversational in style. All participating family members were invited to discuss their views on change and continuity in their son's/daughter's/sibling's lives since the first wave of data collection; their perspectives on the young person's current living situation; their perspectives on the young person's current needs in relation to housing, education, employment and health/mental health; their level of contact with the young person; and their views of current service provision for 'out of home' young people and their families. During the interviews, family members were also invited to reflect on significant events and developments in the young person's life since we last spoke with them and to share their future hopes, concerns and expectations for their child or sibling.

Data Analysis

The collection of biographical interviews over time typically results in a large volume of rich, narrative and discursive (raw) data which, perhaps unsurprisingly, presents unique organisational and analytical challenges in QL studies (Saldaña, 2003; Thomson and Holland, 2003; Lewis, 2007). The management of data was a complex process that involved a number of steps. First, verbatim transcripts of all the interviews were prepared. Next, a coding scheme—comprising 15 conceptual and descriptive categories—was developed to facilitate the labelling, sorting and synthesis of data according to salient issues and emergent patterns and themes. A similar approach to summarising key dimensions of analytical attention was used to schematically organise the data generated during the conduct of interviews with family members. These data were then coded incrementally using the qualitative data analysis software package, NVivo, to prepare them for the formal analysis stage of the analytic process. In order to bring the cumulative strands of experience collected into 'conversation' with each other to explore their interrelationships, a 'case profile' (Thomson, 2007; Henderson *et al.*, 2012) was prepared at baseline for all participants and this profile was updated following the second wave of data collection. These case profiles recorded important information on the young people's homelessness and housing trajectories; their family situations; substance use; health/mental health; experiences of education, training and employment; criminal justice contact; parenthood (where relevant); peer relationships; and service utilisation and engagement. In order to gain insight into "the subjective experience of personal change" (Thomson *et al.*, 2002: 337), key transitions (such as housing, education, employment, identity and so on), critical moments, 'turning points' and future aspirations were also documented.

One of the unique attributes of QL analysis is that it can reveal fresh insights by allowing "findings from one wave to inform the next" through an iterative analytic process (Smith, 2003: 275). Data were analysed synchronically (*across* time) and diachronically (*through* time), thus permitting us to follow individual biographies while also locating them in wider socio-economic and spatial contexts (Thompson *et al.*, 2004). This, in turn, served to illuminate the mechanisms and circumstances that bring about both positive and negative change in the lives of homeless young people and their families, as well as how they respond to and make sense of transition and change over time.

Ethical Considerations and Procedures

Ethical approval for the conduct of both phases of the research was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin. Over the course of the study, the research adhered strictly to the ethical principles developed and implemented during Phase 1 (see Mayock *et al.*, 2014 for a detailed account of the ethical protocols and practices that were observed by the research team at all times throughout the course of the study). In keeping with a growing recognition that informed consent should be a continuous *process* in the context of QL research (Crow *et al.*, 2006; Holland *et al.*, 2006; Taylor, 2015), particularly in the case of youth-orientated research (Saldaña, 2003), the written consent of all participants was sought during *both* phases of the research. Young people and their family members were also made aware that they were under no obligation to continue to participate in this (or any subsequent) phases of the study and that they had the right to withdraw at any time. When conducting interviews, the researchers maintained an attitude of wanting to learn. As a means of ensuring that individuals left the interview feeling that their participation was worthwhile and that they had been afforded an opportunity to be heard, young people and their family members were encouraged to guide the course of the interview and to dictate the range of topics addressed throughout. All participants received a €20 gift voucher as a token of appreciation for their involvement and co-operation with the research process.

Conclusion

A key critique of cross-sectional studies of homelessness is that they produce a static, truncated and over-bleak account of the homelessness experience (Anderson and Christian, 2003; Klodawsky *et al.*, 2009; Snow *et al.*, 1994) because they focus only or primarily on longer-term users of homelessness services and fail to 'track' change in individuals' lives over time. The current study's longitudinal approach has the advantage of having the potential to extend understanding of the housing and homelessness trajectories of 'out of home' youth as well as the factors and experiences that facilitate or, alternatively, act as barriers to housing stability. The following chapter presents a profile of the study's young people and their participating family members.

Chapter 3: Sample Profile

This chapter presents an overview of the study's sample at Phases 1 and 2 of the research, which were conducted approximately two years apart in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Relevant data on the young people's gender, age and living situations are documented in order to provide a contextual backdrop for a detailed analysis of transition, continuity and change in their life experiences over the course of the study. Information on the participating family members, particularly in relation to their living situations and experiences of inter- and intra-generational homelessness, is also presented. The chapter closes with a summary of the young people's pathways out of home based on data collected and analysed during the initial phase of the study.

The Study's Participating Young People

Gender and Age

Table 3.1 presents the number of young people interviewed at Phases 1 and 2 of the study broken down by gender.

Table 3.1: Number of Young People Interviewed at
Phases 1 and 2 of the Study, by Gender

Gender	Phase 1 (2013–14)		Phase 2 (2015–16)
Male	25		17
Female	15		12
Total	40		29

At baseline (Phase 1), 40 young people (25 young men and 15 young women) were interviewed between May 2013 and January 2014. During the second wave of data collection (Phase 2) it was possible to 'track' and re-interview 29 out of the 40 young people (including 17 young men and 12 young women) who took part in the initial study.[1] The process of tracking and the conduct of follow-up interviews took place over a ten-month period between May 2015 and March 2016 in Dublin (26 young people) and Cork (3 young people).

[1] Please see Chapter 2 for a detailed account of the study's tracking process, procedures and challenges.

The participants were aged between 16 and 24 years when we first met with them. The average age for the sample was 19.9 years, with just under one quarter (n = 9) being under the age of 18 when they were initially recruited to take part in the research. Table 3.2 presents a detailed breakdown of the young people's age and gender at Phases 1 and 2 of the study, respectively.

Table 3.2: Number of Young People Interviewed at Phases 1 and 2 of the Study, by Age and Gender

Age	Phase 1 (2013–14)				Phase 2 (2015–16)		
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
16	3	0	3		–	–	–
17	6	0	6		–	–	–
18	1	2	3		2	0	2
19	2	5	7		5	0	5
20	1	4	5		1	0	1
21	3	0	3		1	6	7
22	4	2	6		0	2	2
23	2	2	4		2	0	2
24	3	0	3		3	1	4
25	–	–	–		1	2	3
26	–	–	–		2	1	3
Total	25	15	40		17	12	29

At the time of follow up, the young people ranged in age from 18 to 26 years, with the average age for the sample being 21.9 years. This meant that all participants had reached the legal age of adulthood by Phase 2. Indeed, many had moved on—often abruptly—from youth-orientated services to adult systems of intervention. This transition was typically framed as a 'critical moment' or 'turning point' in the young people's lives and was identified as a difficult process by many, even at Phase 1 (Mayock, *et al.,* 2014). The transition to adult services remained a significant challenge for the study's young people at Phase 2, particularly in relation to problems of access to housing and mental health service provision (see Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion).

Young People's Living Situations

As outlined in Chapter 2, 29 of the 40 young people recruited at baseline were re-interviewed at Phase 2. However, reliable information on the whereabouts and living circumstances of an additional 9 young people (who were not re-interviewed) was also successfully obtained. Table 3.3

presents the young people's living situations at Phase 1 (n = 40) and Phase 2 (n = 38), including those participants who were re-interviewed at follow-up (n = 29) and those for whom reliable information on their living situations was available (n = 9). It is important to note that the figures presented in Table 3.3 are merely a snapshot of the young people's living situations at two points in time and do not capture the extent to which they moved between living situations over the course of the study. The nuances and complexities of their living arrangements, as well as their housing and homelessness transitions and trajectories, will be discussed in far greater detail in later chapters.[2]

Nine young people interviewed at Phase 1 were staying in under-18s 'out of home' provision, including 6 in emergency or short-term accommodation services and 3 in a residential care setting for young people 'in crisis'. Almost half were living in homelessness support services targeting young people aged 18 to 26 years, including supported temporary accommodation (STA) (n = 16) and temporary emergency accommodation (TEA) (n = 2) while 7 were living in adult homelessness services, including adult emergency hostel accommodation (n = 5) and adult supported temporary accommodation (n = 1). Other living situations reported at baseline included semi-independent accommodation (n = 1); B&B accommodation (n = 1); supported lodgings (emergency foster care) (n = 1); and residential aftercare services (n = 2). Finally, one participant was sleeping rough and one had recently entered private rented accommodation following a prolonged period of insecure housing.

By Phase 2, practically all of the young people had moved to alternative accommodation with only one young man remaining in the same living situation—an STA—since we first spoke with him. Five young people reported that they had moved just once between the two phases of the study. However, the vast majority reported *multiple transitions* through a range of living situations. The young people's housing transitions and patterns of movement between Phases 1 and 2 of the research will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. For now, however, a brief overview of their living situations at the time of the follow-up study will be provided.

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2 These later chapters will draw only from the *narrative data* generated from the baseline (n = 40) and follow-up (n = 29) interviews conducted as part of the research.

Table 3.3: Young People's Living Situations at
Phases 1 and 2 of the Study, by Gender

Accommodation Type	Phase 1 (2013–14)				Phase 2 (2015–16)		
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
Under-18s 'out of home' provision	9	0	9		–	–	–
Temporary emergency accommodation (ages 18–23 years)	0	2	2		–	–	–
Supported temporary accommodation (ages 18–26 years)	10	6	16		4	2	6
Semi-independent accommodation	1	0	1		–	–	–
Residential aftercare	0	2	2		1	0	1
Supported temporary accommodation (adult only)	1	0	1		–	–	–
Adult hostel (i.e. night shelter)	2	3	5		4	1	5
B&B accommodation	1	0	1		1	1	2
Rough sleeping	1	0	1		–	–	–
Private rental accommodation	0	1	1		2	3	5
Supported lodgings	0	1	1		–	–	–
Residential care	–	–	–		1	–	1
Parent's/Family home	–	–	–		2	4	6
Local authority housing	–	–	–		0	2	2
House share (no lease)	–	–	–		1	0	1
Living with friends or relatives	–	–	–		3	0	3
Living with partner or partner's family	–	–	–		3	1	4
Prison	–	–	–		1	0	1
Long-term accommodation	–	–	–		0	1	1
Total	25	15	40		23	15	38

No young person was residing in under-18's 'out of home' provision or supported lodgings, which is to be expected since all were aged 18 years or over by the time of follow up. A large number were living in homelessness accommodation services, including youth-orientated STAs (n = 6); adult hostels/night shelters (n = 5); B&Bs (n = 2); or long-term accommodation (LTA) (n = 1). A considerable number of others were residing in situations of 'hidden' homelessness such as living with their partner or with a family member of their partner (n = 4) or living temporarily with friends or relatives (n = 3). One young man was incarcerated and another reported that he was living temporarily in a house share situation with no lease. The remaining young people were living in residential aftercare (n = 1); residential care (n = 1); private rented accommodation (n = 5); had returned to the family home or the home of a parent (typically their mother) (n = 6); or had been allocated local authority housing (n = 2).

These data suggest a continuum of stability/instability in the young people's housing situations by Phase 2. However, a large number of the study's young people remained homeless or were living in situations of 'hidden' homelessness. A lack of appropriate and affordable 'move on' accommodation options, as well as the numerous barriers encountered by them in the private rental market (such as problems in accessing rent allowance, experiences of discrimination from landlords, a lack of follow-on support and/or lack of preparedness for independent living), were consistently highlighted as presenting significant barriers to housing security (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion).

The findings also suggest that parental status and gender may be mediating factors with regard to where young people are positioned on this housing stability/instability spectrum. Perhaps significantly, a majority of those who were living in relatively stable living situations—or had exited homelessness—by the time of follow up were young women who were either pregnant (n = 2) or parents with children in their care (n = 5). Table 3.4 presents a more detailed breakdown of the living situations of the parents (and expectant parents) in the sample by the time of Phase 2. Twelve young people were parents while a further three were expecting their first child; one young woman reported that she had had a miscarriage between Phases 1 and 2 of the study. Those young parents who were interviewed at Phase 2 were parents to 20 children.

Table 3.4: Living Situations of Young People who were Parents at Phase 2

Status Of Children	Current Living Situation	No. Of Young People		
		Male	Female	Total
Expectant parents and parents with children in their care	Private rental sector	1	2	3
	Local authority housing	0	2	2
	Return home	0	3	3
	With partner's family	2	0	2
	B&B	1	0	1
Parents with children who were not in their care	B&B	0	1	1
	STA	1	0	1
	ETA	2	0	2

Four of the young women who were parents were living in either private rented accommodation (n = 2) or local authority housing (n = 2) while three had returned home after they learned of the pregnancy in order to access various forms of familial support (practical, emotional, financial, and so on) and one young woman, whose child was not in her care, was living in a B&B at the time of Phase 2. Conversely, of the seven young men who were parents or expecting a child, four were accessing homelessness services or living in insecure accommodation such as in the home of their partner's family (n = 2). Only one young man—who was expecting his second child and sharing the child care responsibilities of his first child with his mother—was residing in private rented accommodation. It would therefore appear that motherhood, in particular, may have facilitated (or helped to maintain) speedier exits out of homelessness services in a number of cases.

Family Member Participants

A total of 10 family members (5 parents, all of them mothers; and 5 siblings, all sisters) were interviewed at baseline. Eight of these family members were successfully 'tracked' and re-interviewed at Phase 2. Table 3.5 documents the living situations of the participating family members at Phases 1 and 2 of the research.

Table 3.5: Number of Participating Family Members
in Phases 1 and 2 of the Study

Relationship To Young Person	Phase 1 (2013–14)		Phase 2 (2015–16)
Parent (Mother)	5		4
Sibling (Sister)	5		4
Total	10		8

Notably, three family members were homeless at the time they were initially interviewed, with two siblings of the participating young people living in transitional housing and one parent residing in an emergency hostel. A further two family members were living in Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) housing and one of these participants described their living conditions as insecure, precarious, unfit and overcrowded. Three parents were owner occupiers, one family member was residing in private rented accommodation and, finally, one young woman—a sibling, aged 17—was in foster care at the time of her baseline interview.

Table 3.6: Participating Family Members' Living Situations
at Phases 1 and 2 of the Study

Living Situation	Phase 1 (2013–14)			Phase 2 (2015–16)	
	Parent	Sibling		Parent	Sibling
Transitional housing	0	2		–	–
Emergency hostel	1	0		0	1
Rental accommodation scheme (RAS) housing	1	1		0	1
Private rented accommodation	0	1		1	1
Owner occupiers	3	0		3	0
Foster care	0	1		0	1
Total	10			8	

While a majority of the family members (n = 5) were living in the same accommodation at the time of the follow-up study, three participants—two siblings and one mother—reported significant changes to their living arrangements. Jacqui, for example—who was residing in an emergency hostel alongside her adult daughter at the time of Phase 1—had moved to private rented accommodation by the time of follow up and highlighted the

important role of service providers in helping her to secure housing: *"I would be on the street only for them* [staff] *like and I would have nowhere like, you know? The lady* [staff member] *over in* [hostel] *fought for my rent allowance. It* [the house] *is great. Two bedrooms. It's been very, very good for me, I love my house, I love it . . . It's a big change for me"* (Jacqui, Rebecca's mother, Phase 2).

However, two family members—both sisters of participating young people—reported experiences of homelessness since their baseline interviews. Tara, for example, was living in transitional housing when we first met with her and explained during her second interview that she had subsequently lost this accommodation, entered into a situation of 'hidden' homelessness and later accessed emergency hostel accommodation. Samantha—who was living in private rented accommodation at baseline—told that her tenancy in two successive rental properties had been terminated unexpectedly and that she and her family had no choice but to live in the homes of her partner's family members for a prolonged period: *"We got a phone call off the letting agency and they were like, 'Well the landlord wants to move back in so you have to be out in twenty-eight days'"* (Samantha, Aoife's sister, Phase 2). She went on to relate the distressing experience of becoming homeless with her partner and two children before they eventually accessed private rented accommodation.

> *"Oh it was awful, that was the second time . . . well we moved out of* [house #1] *and then the house, I lived in, like a different place—and that got repossessed . . . so we moved down with his* [partner's] *brother for about a week . . . Like I didn't feel comfortable, or welcome, but I didn't care, but the kids, like* [child's name], *he wasn't able for it, he was crying . . . but we had nowhere else to go, or else you're going into the homeless* [but] *I'd never bring me kids into them homeless places. Then we* [went to partner's mother's home]. *And then I was on the internet every single day and I seen this house."* (Samantha, Aoife's sister, Phase 2)

These data point to evolving or continued patterns of inter- and intra-generational homelessness over the course of the study and lend support to the assertion that "where trigger factors exist and are not dealt with, they can be transmitted down the generations (intergenerational) and within families (intra-generational)" (Ravenhill, 2008: 112).

Young People's Pathways Out of Home

Based on data generated at Phase 1, a four-fold typology was developed in order to capture the events, mechanisms and experiences associated with young people's home-leaving trajectories (see Mayock *et al.*, 2014 for a detailed account of the young people's pathways out of home). The origins of these routes could typically be traced to experiences and unfolding

events during early childhood or mid-teenage years. Notwithstanding the diversity, heterogeneity and uniqueness of each young person's story of becoming homeless, it was possible to identify four major pathways out of home. The key features of these four pathways are presented in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Summary of Young People's Pathways Out of Home at Phase 1 of the Study

Pathway	No. Of Young People			Key Points
	Male	Female	Total	
Histories of State care	9	5	14	• Spent extended periods in foster and/ or residential care settings. • High levels of anxiety and uncertainty at the point of entering care. • Experienced placement disruptions and breakdown. • Lack of preparation and support for young people after care.
Household disruption and family instability	5	4	9	• Traumatic life events (e.g. parental separation, bereavement, social deprivation and housing instability). • Fragile family relationships. • Negative coping strategies and behaviours.
Family conflict, family violence	3	6	9	• Experiences of childhood neglect, abuse, parental substance misuse and/or domestic violence. • Many left the family home voluntarily to escape increasingly volatile situations. • Interventions by social workers were typically reported to be unsuccessful.
Problem behaviour and neighbourhood stressors	8	–	8	• Home-based tension related to 'risk' behaviours (e.g. substance use, aggression and criminality). • Negative peer associations and anti-social behaviour. • Exclusions from local areas and communities. • Lack of support services for high risk youth exhibiting challenging behaviours.

It is important to emphasise that while each of the typologies has distinctive features, there were also many *shared experiences* across all four pathways, including experiences of poverty/economic disadvantage, bereavement, social exclusion, disrupted schooling, housing instability, parental substance misuse and/or domestic violence. Furthermore, many of the young people reported care histories (26 reported a history of State care and a further 8 had spent lengthy periods in the informal care of a family member) as well as prolonged episode(s) of 'hidden' homelessness (that is, where they would move between home and staying temporarily in the homes of relatives, friends and/or acquaintances) prior to accessing services and entering the official network of homeless youth. These data therefore suggest that the young people's home-leaving was a non-linear *process* that was precipitated by a diverse range of complex and overlapping familial, individual, structural, socio-economic and community factors that served to 'push' the young people out of home and into homelessness over time.

Conclusion

The sample profile presented in this chapter indicates that, while most young people had experienced at least one—but more frequently multiple—housing transitions, a large number remained homeless or precariously housed by Phase 2 of the study. Chapter 4 will examine the homeless trajectories of the study's young people in far greater detail, as well as the key drivers of their homeless and housing transitions.

Chapter 4: Young People's Homelessness And Housing Transitions

This chapter examines the homelessness and housing transitions of the study's young people. First, the participants' living situations are categorised according to the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) in order to position and frame their living circumstances (at Phase 2) in line with this widely accepted definition of homelessness and housing instability. Following this, a three-fold typology is used to present the patterns of residential stability and instability experienced by the young people since the time of their baseline interviews. These typologies are examined in some detail in order to more fully illustrate the high levels of movement between unstable living situations experienced by a majority of the study's participants. The chapter closes by examining a number of factors and experiences—related, in particular, to young people's service engagement patterns and support needs—that influenced their homeless and housing 'journeys'.

Young People's Living Situations at Phase 2, Categorised according to ETHOS

In 2005, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) and the European Observatory on Homelessness developed ETHOS, which provides a systematic and conceptual definition (or classification) of homelessness that includes four distinct living situations: 1) rooflessness; 2) houselessness; 3) living in insecure accommodation; and 4) living in inadequate accommodation.[1] Conversely, a person is said to be housed if they are residing in "an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (social domain) and having a legal title to occupation (legal domain)".[2] ETHOS—which is underpinned by the idea of a continuum of homeless-

1 Please see Appendix 1 for a more detailed overview of ETHOS. The first two categories (roofless and houseless) are more likely to describe situations of 'homelessness' while the second two categories (insecure and inadequate accommodation) are more likely to describe experiences of 'housing exclusion'.

2 See www.feantsa.org

ness that can be experienced at different junctures across the life course, ranging from people who are 'at risk' of homelessness, to people who are episodically without shelter, to people who are experiencing chronic homelessness and persistent housing exclusion—is widely accepted as a useful framework for defining housing instability (Busch-Geertsema, 2010).

Before outlining the range of categories within ETHOS to which young people were assigned at the time of follow up, it is useful to first present the broader picture in relation to their 'status' as either homeless or housed at Phases 1 and 2 of the research.

Table 4.1: The Homelessness/Housing Status of
Young People at Phases 1 and 2

Homelessness/ Housing Status	Phase 1, 2013–14 Number (%)		Phase 2, 2015–16 Number (%)
Experiencing Homelessness or Housing Exclusion	39 (98%)	➡	22 (76%)
Housed[3]	1 (2%)		7 (24%)
Total	40		29

As Table 4.1 demonstrates, 39 of the 40 young people were experiencing homelessness or housing exclusion at baseline while just one of the participants—a young woman aged 22 years—had been recently housed following a prolonged period of housing instability. By Phase 2, just seven young people had tansitioned to housing while 22 either remained homeless or had entered into a living situation considered to be 'insecure' or 'inadequate'. It is important to note that not all of the young people categorised as homeless or experiencing housing exclusion reported constant or uninterrupted homelessness between Phases 1 and 2 of the study. Indeed, several had exited homelessness temporarily (typically to private rented housing) during the intervening period. However, for various reasons—including experiences of drug-related relapse, personal crises linked to mental health difficulties, family bereavement, an inability to maintain rental payments or because of sub-standard living conditions—these young people were unable to maintain this accommodation and returned to situations of homelessness or housing instability.

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3 This young person had recently moved to private rented accommodation following a prolonged period of homelessness.

Table 4.2 presents the young people's living situations at Phase 2 in greater detail, categorised according to ETHOS. These data suggest a continuum of residential stability and instability at the time of follow up: of the 29 young people re-interviewed, seven (24%) were categorised as 'housed'; a further seven (24%) were categorised as living in 'insecure' accommodation; 12 (41%) were categorised as 'houseless'; one (3%) was categorised as 'roofless'; and two (8%) were categorised as living in 'inadequate' accommodation.

Table 4.2: Young People's Living Situations at Phase 2
Categorised According to ETHOS

Conceptual Category	Operational Category	No. Of Young People		
		Male	Female	Total
Housed	1. Living in a stable place of habitation that satisfies all physical, legal, and social requirements.	3	4	7
Insecure	1. People living in insecure accommodation. 2. People living under threat of eviction. 3. People living under threat of violence.	5	2	7
Houseless	1. People in homelessness accommodation. 2. People in women's shelters. 3. People due to be released from institutions (i.e. prisons, residential drug/alcohol treatment and residential care). 4. People receiving longer-term support due to homelessness.	8	4	12
Roofless	1. People living rough. 2. People staying in emergency accommodation (i.e. night shelters).	1	0	1
Inadequate	1. People living in unfit housing. 2. People living in extreme overcrowding.	0	2	2

Housed

The seven young people categorised as 'housed' reported either a stable return to the family home (n = 1) or were living in private rented (n = 4) or local authority housing (n = 2): *"I couldn't stop smiling, I was chuffed, knowing that I was going to be out* [of homelessness]. *It meant something. It meant I have a good base that I can go to, me own space"* (Oisín, 26, Phase 2). These young people often talked at length about how sourcing stable accommodation had helped to alleviate the high levels of stress and anxiety that they reported at baseline when they lived in various homelessness settings or other insecure living situations: *"It's like a weight lifted off you; you've your own door, your own place, you know what I mean, it took an awful lot of stress off me basically"* (Collette, 22, Phase 2). This was particularly the case for young people who were parents and invariably emphasised the importance of the sense of security, privacy and safety that stable housing had provided, which also helped to bolster their ability to cope with the transition to parenthood.

> *"Very happy. I love it, I absolutely love it* [referring to local authority housing]*, I love my own freedom and space. I'm back on my feet now, I'm working and I'm going back to college next year."* (Sinéad, 21, Phase 2)

However, not all young people who were housed by the time of Phase 2 expressed satisfaction about their living arrangements. Although Chloe, for example, felt secure in her current accommodation in the private rented sector where she was living with her young child, she did not view it as suitable in the longer-term because of space constraints (it was a one-bedroom apartment) and the substandard physical condition of the accommodation: *"Like it's just badly built basically, but it is the best I can get"* (Chloe, 24, Phase 2).

Insecure Housing

Seven young people were categorised as living in 'insecure' housing; all were at risk of re-entering homelessness because of an unstable return to the family home (n = 2); because they did not have a legal (sub)tenancy (n = 1); or because they were living temporarily in the homes of friends, relatives, a partner, or a family member of their partner (n = 4). These participants were acutely aware of the fragility of their living situations, which they typically framed as tenuous, unstable and undesirable: *"Well I'm at risk* [of homelessness] *of course, like I don't have a contract in me hand, no lease . . . I think that because I haven't been using services, they don't see me as homeless, which they should. They don't see me as homeless as I am"* (Bryan, 24, Phase 2).

Shortly after his first interview, Patrick moved back to his mother's house after being 'kicked out' of a youth-orientated STA, having accrued significant rent arrears. However, things quickly deteriorated due to long-standing relationship difficulties with his mother; he was subsequently forced to re-enter homelessness and embark on a pattern of sleeping rough and alternating between the homes of friends and backpacker hostels. At the time of follow up, he had recently returned to his mother's house as a last resort, having exhausted all other options. Patrick's account, like others in this category, highlights the precariousness and unpredictability of living in these insecure living situations: *"Things could change like that . . . it's stable right now but I could have a fight with me ma and she could just be like, 'Get out', and I'll have nowhere to go then"* (Patrick, 23, Phase 2).

Houseless

Twelve participants were classified as 'houseless' by Phase 2 of the study. These young people reported that they were either due to leave residential care (n = 2) or were living in a B&B (n = 2), supported temporary accommodation (STA) (n = 5) or in temporary emergency accommodation (TEA) on a long-term basis (that is, for more than six months) (n = 3). Participants experiencing houselessness often stated that they felt 'trapped' in the service system because of a lack of appropriate 'move on' options, which, in turn, led to a continuous cycle of service use: *"I want to move on* [from TEA]*, we've* [referring to partner] *been there six months now. It's like I'm waking up every morning in the same one room like, you know what I mean? It's making me more depressed"* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2). A lack of 'move on' options was also reported by young people who were preparing to leave care settings but had nowhere to go at the time of their departure. Christopher, for example, had recently turned 18 and was preparing to leave a residential care unit at the time of his follow-up interview. In the following excerpt, he explained that limited housing supply, coupled with a highly competitive rental market and uncertainties related to his aftercare payments, were preventing him from speedily sourcing independent housing.

> *"There's not a lot of apartments. You know the way, like there is kind of a housing crisis and that stuff? You have to wait two weeks to get your first month's rent and deposit* [referring to aftercare payment] *but, you see, some people go to the viewing with their first month deposit, cash. And they* [landlords] *are kind of like, 'Well, we could have someone in tomorrow'. So, it is hard, we lost one apartment already."* (Christopher, 18, Phase 2)

Roofless

One young person was classified as 'roofless' at the time of follow up and was alternating between sleeping rough and accessing emergency hostels on a night-by-night basis: *"I'm just being shipped here and there and here and there. They* [services] *move me around night by night by night because they can't give me somewhere with 24-hour access"* (Michael, 25, Phase 2). Michael had opted not to access emergency hostel accommodation and the following account illustrates the transience and disruption that characterised his daily life.

> *"The room* [in emergency hostel] *would be the same size as this and there would be twenty people with twenty blankets. I would rather just stay out* [sleep rough]. *I'm just walking around all day lost, like even just small little things about like clothes; for example, there is nowhere to keep my clothes so I have to bring that bag around."*
> (Michael, 25, Phase 2)

Inadequate Housing

Two young women—who had both returned to live with their mothers when they became pregnant—were categorised as living in 'inadequate' housing because they were residing in overcrowded conditions. One of these young women, Phoebe, was pregnant when we met with her for the second time and was sharing a single bedroom with her mother, sister and her sister's infant: *"[It's] crowded because there's three of us in the room and a baby, so crowded, yeah. It's just not somewhere I would like to live for too long with the baby with the space and all"* (Phoebe, 25, Phase 2). The second young woman, Fiona, was sharing a single bedroom with her sister and her sister's young child as well as her own child who was 14 months old. Although Fiona stated that she was under no immediate pressure to move out, like Phoebe, she was aware that her living situation was substandard and not tenable in the longer-term. She expressed a strong desire for a greater sense of privacy and autonomy and spoke at length about her worries about "what's going to happen next" in relation to sourcing appropriate housing.

> *"[It's] a hectic house. No space for yourself to be comfortable and stuff . . . It's just I want me own comfort. She's* [referring to mother] *like, 'Fiona don't you think it's about time to get out?' I'm like, 'Eh, there's nowhere for me to go so you're stuck with me!'"* (Fiona, 21, Phase 2)

Young People's Trajectories Through Homelessness

This section explores the processes, events and mechanisms that impacted the young people's trajectories through homelessness. All of the young people had moved at least once between the two phases of the research but, for the sample as a whole, there was considerable diversity in the extent to which they had alternated between living situations. The analysis presented here aims to capture these patterns of residential change in a way that permits a greater understanding of the nature and 'shape' of the young people's routes through, and possibly out of, homelessness. The following three-fold typology (see Tables 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5) was developed in accordance with the level of housing stability or instability reported by the young people over the course of the study:

1. *Linear Trajectories through Homelessness*

2. *Non-linear Trajectories through Homelessness*

3. *Chaotic Trajectories and Continuous Homelessness*

It is important to note that the number of residential moves or transitions assigned to each participant is an approximate estimate (and, most likely, an under-estimation, in many cases) since some young people were unable to accurately quantify the number of places that they had lived in or moved between since the time of their first interview. This was particularly the case for young people who had spent periods alternating between the homes of numerous friends and/or relatives (that is, moving between situations of 'hidden' homelessness) and/or those who had been accessing emergency hostels on a nightly basis at various junctures: *"I was on the Freephone for a year, rang up every night . . . Every hostel in* [county name] *I was staying in"* (Ross, 19, Phase 2).

Linear Trajectories through Homelessness

As can be seen from the data presented in Table 4.3, those young people (n = 7) who experienced linear trajectories through homelessness were comparatively younger than others in the sample, with the average age being 20.3 years. These participants were categorised as 'housed' (n = 4), 'houseless' (n = 2) and living in 'inadequate' accommodation (n = 1) in accordance with ETHOS (as outlined in the previous section) by Phase 2 of the study. Significantly, a majority of the participants in this group reported notable progress towards greater security, stability and independence with regard to their living situations since the time of their baseline interviews,

having moved, for example, from residential care to residential aftercare or from a semi-independent living situation to the private rented sector, and so on. These young people typically reported:

a. *Relative* stability and predictability in relation to their housing trajectories as well as low levels of residential mobility, typically having moved only once or twice;

b. More positive and supportive relationships with family members and service professionals, as well as higher levels of engagement with support services (including homelessness and housing services, aftercare provision and education/training programmes); and

c. Low(er) level needs in relation to mental health problems and substance (mis)use.

Table 4.3: Linear Trajectories through Homelessness

Linear Trajectories through Homelessness			
Name	Age	Moves	Major Housing Transitions since Phase 1
Chistopher	18	1	Under 18s 'out of home' provision → Residential care
Eoghan	19	2	Under 18s 'out of home' provision → Residential care → Residential aftercare
Seán	19	1	Under 18s 'out of home' provision → Returned to family home
Chloe	24	1	PRS#1 → PRS#2
Fiona	21	1	STA → Mother's house
Alison	21	2	ETA → STA#1 → STA#2
Ashley	21	3	STA → Semi-independent housing → PRS#1 → PRS#2
Average	20.3	1.4	

Non-linear Trajectories through Homelessness

Young people who reported non-linear housing trajectories (n = 13) were slightly older, with the average age being 23 years (see Table 4.4). Using the definitions of housing stability and instability outlined by ETHOS, these young people were classified as 'housed' (n = 3), 'houseless' (n = 3), living in 'inadequate' (n = 1) or 'insecure' (n = 5) accommodation and 'roofless' (n = 1). Unlike those who experienced more linear pathways, all of the young people in this group reported that they had moved back and forth (usually on multiple occasions) between various homeless (and other)

service settings. Their routes through homelessness were also punctuated by returns home as well as by brief periods spent living temporarily in the homes of friends or relatives, private rented sector accommodation and/ or time spent in residential treatment faciles, in some cases. The housing trajectories of these young people were typically characterised by:

a. Higher levels of residential mobility and unpredictability, with young people typically moving between three and four times;

b. Fewer supportive relationships with family members and service professionals as well as less frequent or episodic engagement with homelessness/housing (and other) systems of intervention; and

c. Experiences of domestic violence, reported bouts of depression and drug-related relapses and/or increased levels of substance use.

Table 4.4: Non-linear Trajectories through Homelessness

Non-linear Trajectories through Homelessness			
Name	Age	Moves	Major Housing Transitions since Phase 1
Bryan	24	4	STA#1 → ETA → STA#2 → Father's house → PRS (no lease)
Peter	24	4	STA → Rough sleeping → ETA#1 → ETA#2 → B&B
Simon	21	3	STA → PRS#1 → PRS#2 → Partner's relative's house
Gary	20	4	STA#1 → Rough sleeping → ETAs → Residential treatment → STA#2
Phoebe	25	3	STA#1 → STA#2 → PRS → Mother's house
Maria	25	3	STA#1 → Mother's house → STA#2 → Mother's house
Abigail	21	4	Residential aftercare #1 → Residential aftercare #2 (step-down) → Parent's house → Friends'/relatives' houses → Partner's family home
Collette	22	5	ETA#1 → PRS → Mother's house → Relative's house → ETA#2 → Local authority housing
Sinéad	21	4	Residential aftercare → Partner's family home → Friends'/relatives' houses→ Mother's house → Local authority housing
Shane	19	3	Under 18s 'out of home' provision →Residential aftercare → Friend's house → Partner's family home
Michael	25	4	ETA → PRS#1 → Residential treatment → PRS#2 → Rough sleeping
Oisín	26	5	Rough sleeping → STA → Friends' houses → Relative's house →Girlfriend's apartment → PRS
Warren	26	9	STA#1 → STA#2 →PRS#1 → PRS#2 → PRS #3 →ETAs → STA#4 → B&B → Relative's house → STA#5
Average	23	4.2	

Chaotic Trajectories and Continuous Homelessness

Table 4.5 (opposite) presents data on young people who reported chaotic trajectories and continuous homelessness (n = 9), the average age for this group being 21.4 years. In accordance with ETHOS definitions, a majority of these young people were 'houseless' (n = 6) or living in 'insecure' accommodation (n = 2). One young man was classified as 'housed' following a protracted period of moving between various homelessness settings and unstable living situations. These young people's homeless histories were lengthy, characterised by prolonged periods of 'hidden' homelessness and rough sleeping as well as a continuous circuit of service use including repeated stays in—and constant movement between—emergency and short-term service settings, drug/alcohol treatment faciles, prison and psychiatric hospitals. In other words, these participants had entered into, or continued on, a cycle of homelessness and housing instability since the time of their baseline interviews. Their accounts typically demonstrated:

a. Very high levels of residential mobility, insecurity and transience, with young people reporting between five and nine moves between living places;

b. Weak and/or strained relationships with family members and service professionals as well as low levels of engagement with services and service providers; and

c. Complex and overlapping high-level support needs related to long-standing mental health problems (such as depression and suicidal ideation), substance misuse and criminal justice contact.

Table 4.5: Chaotic Trajectories and Continuous Homelessness

Chaotic Housing Trajectories and Continuous Homelessness			
Name	Age	Moves	Major Housing Transitions since Phase 1
Ross	19	6	Under-18s 'out of home' provision → ETAs → Rough sleeping → Friends' houses → Relatives' houses → ETA → STA
Sophie	22	3	STA → Rough sleeping → ETA#1 → ETA#2
Aaron	18	6	Under-18s 'out of home' provision → Residential care → Partner's apartment → ETA#1 →ETAs → Friends'/relatives' houses →STA
Raphael	24	5	STA#1 → STA#2 → Rough sleeping →ETAs →Friend's house →ETAs
Patrick	23	5	STA → Mother's house → Friend's family home → Sleeping rough → Backpacker hostel → Mother's house
Sarah	25	7	ETA#1 → ETAs → STA#1 → High threshold housing → STA#2 → Local authority housing →Friend's house → B&B
Aoife	21	5	ETA → Prison → Residential treatment→ Relative's house →Friend's house → STA
Alan	18	7	Under-18s 'out of home' provision #1 → Under-18s 'out of home' provision #2 → Residential aftercare → Friends' houses →Partner's house → Father's house → Friend's house
Paul	23	9	STA#1 → Friend's mother's house → Rough sleeping → ETAs →Residential alcohol/drug treatment → Residential alcohol/drug treatment (step-down) →STA#2 → Relative's house → PRS
Average	21.4	5.8	

Young People's Stories of Movement and Residential Change

While the narratives of the study's young people revealed many unique experiences and circumstances, it was possible to identify a number of distinct characteristics associated with the dominant patterns of residential movement and change outlined in the previous section. The quality and nature of the young people's level of engagement with services/service professionals emerged repeatedly as key features of their stories of 'transition'. Young people's accounts of residential change also frequently referenced 'turning points', instabilities and risks related to substance use and mental health. This section examines the ways in which young people's homelessness and housing trajectories were impacted by the interplay of these processes, paying particular attention to: the nature and 'shape' of young people's engagement with services and their support needs in terms of substance (mis)use and mental health.

The Nature and 'Shape' of Young People's Engagement with Services

While many of the young people reported that they were in regular contact with services and service providers, distinct differences were evident in the *nature* of their engagement with service systems and professionals. Significantly, the extent to which young people considered their connections with service providers to be positive or negative appeared to strongly shape the contours of their housing transitions. This was because positive or supportive links with service professionals (key workers, outreach workers, aftercare workers, social workers and so on) typically bolstered young people's ability and willingness to engage with various homelessness and housing support systems over time which, in turn, was linked to fewer and smoother transitions between living situations: *"I was linked in with a woman from* [homelessness organisation]. *She's the one that got me the place* [STA]*, and she was a great help. I actually thought I was going nowhere until I met her"* (Fiona, 21, Phase 2). Those who reported strong links or 'bonds' with service providers also demonstrated greater knowledge of the various support services and entitlements available to them compared to others who reported less (or far less) service engagement. Furthermore, many spoke about how service workers had provided important assistance throughout the process of both securing and transitioning to appropriate 'move on' accommodation. Indeed, several, such as Ashley and Christopher below, talked at length about the support they had received from one or more service staff members.

> *". . . And then with moving as well, they* [housing support team] *help me—they've been great for all that because they don't want to put any added pressure on me."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

> *"I just went from like a few nights in* [under-18s 'out of home' provision] *to a few nights here* [residential care unit] *and then every second night then. And I kind of just moved in. I didn't really notice it."* (Christopher, 18, Phase 2)

Conversely, a considerable number of young people reported that they found it difficult to engage with services due, in some cases, to past negative experiences with a service(s) and/or their weak, tenuous or strained links with staff members in one or more service settings: *"I had a fight with the staff in* [hostel] *and wasn't allowed back in"* (Ross, 19, Phase 2). Relationship difficulties with staff members were very often exacerbated by the disruption arising from their continuous movement between living situations, which negatively impacted young people's ability to form

meaningful connections with service professionals. With the passing of time, many became frustrated with having to repeatedly re-tell their 'stories', illustrating the extent to which regular moves can create barriers to communication and engagement with support staff.

> "Staff members in good hostels and good accommodation; they take the time to get to know people. But I can tell you first hand, it is so frustrating that I get to know [a staff member] over the space of a year and a half and when you move on that means nothing. It means nothing, you're gone. And then I get to know someone else for two years and I work really hard for this person. Then they're gone and it starts from scratch." (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

Similar patterns of residential instability emerged in the narratives of young people who were no longer able to access systems of intervention due, for example, to 'ageing out' of particular services, being 'barred' because of rule-breaking, reaching (or exceeding) the maximum length of stay in certain facilities and/or failing to meet the eligibility criteria for aftercare provision. In a considerable number of cases, these young people had no 'move on' accommodation options and limited support mechanisms in place at the time of discharge. As a consequence, their transitions out of these services were often unassisted and depicted as highly distressing, chaotic and unpredictable, as Ross and Sophie's accounts illustrate.

> "Like I was up there [under-18s 'out of home' provision] loads of times and they told me, 'Ah we'll get you a place, we'll get you this, we'll get you that'. And then when I turned 18, two weeks after, I was kicked out. They were throwing me into the hostels, the homeless system." (Ross, 19, Phase 2)

> "[Key worker] just came up to us and said to us that we have to leave [STA due to exceeding length of stay] in the next like three or four weeks, that's what they gave us. And we were like, 'Move where like?'. So you're basically thrown out onto the street. We [referring to partner] had nowhere to go so we ended up getting a tent and staying in the park. I lost everything. I was left with basically nothing but the clothes on my back." (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)

These participants were more likely to have limited knowledge about available support services and to express strong feelings of dissatisfaction with service providers, who they felt had failed to meet their housing and other support needs. Michael—who was alternating between sleeping rough and accessing emergency hostels at the time of his Phase 2 interview—told that he did not know of any service where he could access help while Sophie explained that she was "left in the dark" following her departure from an STA.

"There are no real services I would be linking in with because I don't think there is even services that I can link in with? They can just tell me what to say—so I don't see what help I could get from them. Like [they] *can't actually get that bed for me."* (Michael, 25, Phase 2)

"You know, once I moved from there [STA] *I wasn't even allowed in the front door. I didn't know nothing. I was left in the dark."* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)

The impact of negative experiences and interactions within service settings was two-fold in that: 1) young people became increasingly disengaged from services and service providers; and 2) service professionals were therefore unable to identify and respond effectively or appropriately to the young person's housing (and other) support needs. Disengagement from services placed young people at higher risk of embarking on trajectories characterised by high levels of residential displacement and social isolation, making them more vulnerable to continued homelessness and housing instability as well as exposing them to other risks, including substance use and mental health problems.

The Support Needs of Young People: Substance Use and Mental Health

While some young people reported that their substance use and/or stability in mental health had remained largely unchanged between Phases 1 and 2 of the research, others reported significant changes in that their situations had either consistently—or episodically—improved or dis-improved over the course of the study. Many non-substance using participants, or young people who were trying to curb their use of alcohol and/or drugs, experienced additional moves between services as they attempted to seek out substance-free environments that would better suit their needs: *"It* [hostel] *was just full of drugs. I says, 'I can't be doing this', so I started staying in family members' houses then"* (Oisín, 26, Phase 2).

In several cases, young people's routes through homelessness had been punctuated by drug-related relapses, increased substance use or periods of poor mental health: *"It's when I stop taking them* [referring to prescribed medication]*, that's when I go downhill"* (Aoife, 21, Phase 2). Returns to insecure living situations were a particular point of vulnerability for these young people and many reported that heightened levels of substance use and/or deteriorating mental health coincided with periods spent rough sleeping and/or living (back) in emergency provision.

"I was walking around and I was just thinking of things. My mind was over-thinking and I just burst out into tears and I couldn't stop like. And, to be honest, I felt a bit suicidal like. My mental health was at rock bottom. I felt like I was taking a nervous breakdown, I felt like I just couldn't take it anymore." (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)

Like Sophie, a number of participants reported highly complex and overlapping support needs related to long-standing mental health problems as well as problematic substance use and criminal justice contact. The homelessness and housing pathways of these young people were often interrupted by repeat stays in institutional settings, including acute or psychiatric hospitals, residential alcohol/drug treatment facilities and prison. While some benefited temporarily from the structure and targeted support that these facilities provided, of significance is that many returned to unstable living situations at the point of discharge. Joe, for instance, had stayed in his friend's family home after he left an STA following ongoing tension with staff members and the fact that his stay in the service could no longer be extended. In the absence of support, his substance use quickly spiralled out of control.

"Things just started fucking going, spiralling downhill and we were just partying every night, we were taking loads of tablets [un-prescribed medication]*, I was going out robbing and I was just doing stupid things basically."* (Joe, 22, Phase 2)

His mental health deteriorated rapidly, resulting in his admission to an accident and emergency department and, subsequently, to a psychiatric hospital following a suicide attempt. With nowhere to go at the time of his departure, he re-entered a situation of 'hidden' homelessness and explained that he felt he was "going around in circles" during this period.

"And they [hospital staff] *were trying to put me into hostels again. I said, 'I'm not going back there, I'll quicker just go out and sleep on the streets'. So the day I left, I ended up back in me friend's house again. I was just going around in circles."* (Joe, 22, Phase 2)

The relationship between high levels of residential instability and young people's support needs in relation to substance use and mental health is clearly complex; it is also bi-directional in the sense that prolonged patterns of movement between homelessness and insecure living situations were not only precipitated by drug- and/or mental health-related crises, in many cases, but also served to exacerbate these difficulties over time. This, in turn, further hampered these young people's ability to successfully navigate a route to housing stability, resulting in complex and often chaotic patterns of movement between service settings and situations of 'hidden'

homelessness. These findings suggest that young people's situations were being managed via homelessness service provision but not ultimately resolved due, at least in part, to long-standing issues related to their substance use and mental health.

Conclusion

This chapter has documented the young people's transitions through homelessness and housing over the course of the study. Significantly, 76% of the study's young people continued to experience homelessness or housing exclusion approximately two years subsequent to our first contact with them. This finding clearly demonstrates the significant challenges that young people who enter the homelessness service sector are likely to face in securing stable housing and also points to a whole host of challenges and barriers associated with young people's attempts to navigate the service system and successfully negotiate a path to housing stability. A majority had experienced numerous residential moves since Phase 1 of the study and some of these moves can be reasonably characterised as further compromising their ability to achieve and maintain stability in their lives. Generally speaking, young people's stories of residential movement and change—as well as the process of transitioning between living situations—appeared to be more linear for participants who were engaged with services, reported positive relationships with service professionals and demonstrated low(er)-level needs in relation to substance use and mental health.

Chapter 5: Non-Housing Transitions

Young people's journeys through and out of homelessness were diverse, complex and multi-dimensional and typically involved a whole host of events and experiences that extended beyond those associated with the process of accessing and maintaining housing. This chapter focuses on the non-housing transitions of the study's young people, including those related to peer and family relationships; education, training and employment; parenthood and 'identity'. The analysis examines the significance and meaning of these non-housing transitions for young people as they attempted to negotiate a route to housing stability.

Managing Peer Relationships

"It [STA] *was in its way safe. It's just that the people that lived in it wasn't."* (Fiona, 21, Phase 2)

Young people typically described street and/or hostel life in sharply negative terms and characterised most of the social connections they forged in these contexts as transient in nature: *"There is no friends, there is no real friends"* (Michael, 26, Phase 2). Many also described their constant encounters with substance use and anti-social behaviour within homelessness 'scenes', often linked to a lack of routine, restricted hostel opening hours and/or with young people simply having nowhere to go during the day: *"*[Young people need] *somewhere to go like during the day rather than just being out all the time and then that leads to me drinking, charge sheets, all that roaming the streets with nothing to do"* (Ross, 19, Phase 2).

It was very apparent from young men's narratives, in particular, that managing friendships was perceived as an important enabler to successfully negotiating and maintaining a route out of homelessness. Many described ways in which they had attempted to disconnect from peers who they perceived to be entrenched in a homeless 'lifestyle': *"I just don't want to be surrounded by* [drug users] *and all. I'm trying to do good"* (Alan, 19, Phase 2). Eoghan explained that he had made efforts to manage and change his peer relationships in order to minimise his exposure to 'risky' activities that could potentially jeopardise his housing stability while Paul—who was living in private rented accommodation at the time of his follow-up

interview—told that his new peer group had positively influenced his general outlook and wellbeing.

"I have one charge left, nothing serious, picking up them charges was ridiculous, nineteen years of age and semi-independent, have to get my life together, it's a bit ridiculous, carrying on like that. So I got away from that crowd. I think they all just split because we all knew we were a bad influence on each other and just sort of broke up piece by piece." (Eoghan, 19, Phase 2)

"I came up here [referring to county] *to start a new life, not fall back into my old one. A few people who are out here, they're all doing well and they're all nice, quiet young fellas, and we go out and play football on a Sunday, going on walks . . . I feel good about myself, waking up in the morning and feeling great."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

Similarly, Oisín—who had recently exited homelessness and was living in private rented accommodation—explained that a new peer group had enabled him to reduce substance use and his level of engagement in criminal activity which, in turn, had helped him to carve a route to stable housing: *"The alcohol and drugs, that's dropped big time, I have a different selection of friends actually and they're clean. They're clean and sober"* (Oisín, 26, Phase 2). He went on to elaborate on the "big changes" that accompanied the relationships he had established with peers not connected to homelessness services.

"The lads were saying, 'Like come on and do something with yourself'. I mean they work and they still have college. That's a big change compared to the people who I've met in town over the nine and a half years [of being homeless]. *Everything's actually going great.* [Have] *me own place, which is good. Name's down for courses, I'm down volunteering to build a CV. It's like a big change* [going from] *crime to fucking volunteering, do you know what I mean? So it's a lot to be happy about. If I was still in town with the sleeping bag, I'd be still using it—I'd be smoking it* [heroin]*, you know."* (Oisín, 26, Phase 2)

Moves towards more independent living situations frequently coincided with distinct attempts on the part of young people to distance themselves from homelessness and/or street environments: *"I gave up me old friends because they were a bit different than me—I wanted a bit more than what they wanted in life"* (Bryan, 23, Phase 2); *"I don't be with that crowd, I'm avoiding that crowd. I'm after bettering myself in the last year and I want to keep on that road, I don't want to slip back"* (Simon, 21, Phase 2). In the following excerpts, Aoife and Warren explained their reasons for deciding to leave their former peer networks 'behind' as they sought greater stability in their lives.

"That group [referring to homeless peers] *was probably based on alcohol and drugs . . . So a lot of the time we would have been all taking drugs together. I went back to going out with my old mates that I used to be in school with. Like the friends that I hang around with now they wouldn't have ever taken drugs."* (Aoife, 21, Phase 2)

"I don't want to be living that life and getting into trouble all the time. That's basically what I want to do. So that's why I stopped contact with bad people who's taking drugs and all that." (Warren, 26, Phase 2)

According to a considerable number, mixing with peers who they respected and perceived as "doing good" encouraged and motivated them to strive for change and the achievement of similar life goals and aspirations.

"I'm with a new crowd now. They're all good, they have jobs, they're all dry [referring to the absence of substance use]. [So] *I've changed my life around completely."* (Simon, 21, Phase 2)

"I won't go near town, I'll avoid, I don't talk to anybody that I would have spoke to when I was living in town. Nobody knows where I am, and that's the way I want to keep it. I'll be good, I'm around good people—there's a couple of lads around here, they're all doing well and they're all nice young fellas." (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

These accounts suggest that young people's homeless 'identities' were strongly linked to peers with whom they had developed relationships whilst residing in homelessness services or on the street. They also highlight young people's awareness of the impact of these connections and relationships on their lives and their perceived need to dissociate from street 'scenes'.

"I think the most important thing about going through services is to not take that legacy with you [and] *bring it in to the future."* (Bryan, 23, Phase 2)

"I had such a bad feeling in town all the time [referring to when he was homeless]. *I* [was] *constantly anxious, I was a recluse and I wouldn't leave the house because I started getting in so much trouble. I was afraid because I built up so many enemies there, fighting with so many people . . . Once you're out of town, it's much easier. I'm staying away from all that shit now, robbing and picking up charges and all. I'm much happier living up here. It's a quiet little town, it's just nice, there's no fucking trouble. I'm trying to just keep the head down and it's going great so far."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

Young people's accounts sometimes simultaneously demonstrated an awareness of the precariousness of their situations and many acknowledged how quickly a downward spiral can develop, particularly during times of crisis. For example, at the time of his Phase 2 interview, Michael had recently returned to homelessness following a period of housing stability

in private rented accommodation and was alternating between sleeping rough and accessing ETAs. His account highlights the vulnerability of young people who are abruptly forced back into hostel and/or street-based settings and the ease with which they can, once again, become entrenched in a cycle of homelessness, substance use and criminality.

> *"Like there is only so long you can stay on the streets before you get sucked back into it all . . . People that I either bought drugs off and sold drugs to . . . that I would still stop and mix with half the time just for the sake of someone to talk to. So that's what I'm saying to you, that's how you slowly get dragged back into that."* (Michael, 25, Phase 2)

Peers featured centrally in the narratives of the study's young people and young men, in particular, talked spontaneously about the positive and negative effects of their peer groups. They often reflected on the 'path' they had embarked upon in association with street-based acquaintances and several simultaneously articulated a perceived need to 'move on' from street-based connections if they were to successfully negotiate a route out of homelessness.

Education, Training and Employment

Overall, relatively low educational attainment was reported among the study's young people, with more than three-quarters of the 40 young people interviewed at baseline having left school prior to completing their second-level schooling (see Mayock *et al.*, 2014 for a more detailed account of the young people's schooling and school experiences). However, most had returned to education and/or were actively seeking to enrol in various training programmes at some point over the course of the research. In keeping with the views expressed by a majority during their Phase 1 interviews (Mayock *et al.*, 2014), almost all continued to share a strong belief that attaining educational qualifications and engaging with educational services was crucial if they were to: 1) accrue essential life skills and establish a sense of structure and a daily routine that would enable them to address issues such as low self-esteem, depression, social isolation and boredom; and 2) successfully transition to employment, financial independence and housing security.

> *"Why do I want to get back into education? I don't want to be sitting around like this while having a child. I'm going to need to be getting up and doing something every morning as well. I want to have something for like in the future job-wise. A career path, that's the main thing."* (Warren, 26, Phase 2)

"Like sometimes you talk to people and you tell them you're depressed and they say, 'Oh you need medication, or you need this you need that'. And I always said, 'No I don't. I just need to go to college' and as soon as I started college I just perked up, and I—like I feel happy. Like I never get—I never really feel depressed. So like it's a huge thing for me to be isolated. Like I hate not being around people or not having anyone to talk to . . . I do parenting better when I have a structure in my own life. So like that's—that's made me feel better about myself, which again that makes me not depressed . . . It's just made me feel like I'm—I'm good at something." (Chloe, 24, Phase 2)

Eight of the 29 young people who were re-interviewed at Phase 2 (including five young men and three young women) were participating in education or training courses. Alison, for example, was enrolled in a FÁS training course, which she felt had introduced a measure of certainty and financial security to her life generally, while also having a positive impact on her personal wellbeing and sense of self, in particular: *"Oh my God I love it* [the course]*, I just, honestly, it's after changing me so much in so many ways. I feel back to me, I feel back to Alison like happy and jolly"* (Alison, 21, Phase 2). Reflecting on her life at the time of her Phase 1 interview—when she was finding it difficult to cope with the recent death of a family member—she commented that had she attempted to engage with the course at that point she *"would have walked out. Wouldn't have had the head for it"* (Alison, 21, Phase 2). Alison was in the process of seeking private rented accommodation when we met her for the second time and viewed participation in education as essential to helping her to focus on *"what to do and where* [she] *wants to go"* (Alison, 21, Phase 2).

A considerable number of young people drew attention to the persistent difficulties they confronted in seeking to access, maintain or complete education and training courses while living in homelessness accommodation. These challenges were typically associated with what they described as the unsettling and transient nature of hostel environments, in particular: *"They move me around night by night by night . . . I can't start the course and then come back into town and I'll have to wait until nine or ten at night to get in* [to the hostel] *and there might be studying and shit that I have to do"* (Michael, 25, Phase 2). In other instances, young people had no option but to drop out of full-time education in order to receive better financial and welfare supports, while others identified a lack of affordable childcare services as a barrier to engaging with either full- or part- time training courses.

"They [staff in homeless support service and the welfare office] *just felt it was better for me to drop out* [of college]*, be on Rent Allowance, go private rent and sort out my life gradually kind of that way."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

"Would you believe, I was meant to start [a course] *in September but the crèche was €94 a week to get the three children in. I got into the course, I got accepted and the whole lot but I couldn't keep up obviously with the fees of the crèche. It was too expensive, I couldn't keep that going like."* (Collette, 22, Phase 2)

Several also noted that having no fixed address or stable accommodation at various junctures further diminished their ability to (re)engage with education and training programmes: *"You see I can't even apply for them* [courses] *until I get the fixed* [address] *. . . I have been told there is still places on the courses like I just need to get somewhere that I can use as that address"* (Michael, 25, Phase 2). Maria reported an unstable return to her family home following the birth of her child and felt that not having a secure place to live was preventing her from returning to education. She believed that access to education and training could potentially pave the way to a whole host of opportunities that would bolster her chances of achieving housing stability in the future.

"I'm in a place now where there's no traction, getting my own place gives me that bit of traction to get her [daughter] *into a crèche, get into college, you know, then do a proper degree or work somewhere, do all these things that are ultimately going to just make it better for everyone. That's what I need to be doing to get forward. I get a job, I'm not on the social* [welfare]. *I move out of my mam's. I'm a productive member of society. Everybody wins by me not being homeless anymore."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

Only four young people were employed at the time of follow-up and an additional two were working as part of the Community Employment (CE) Scheme. A small number reported that they had been employed (often informally and 'off the books') for periods over the course of the study but they subsequently lost these jobs for various reasons (including relapse, sub-standard working conditions and employer cut-backs). Young people with histories of incarceration (nine in total, all of them young men) frequently discussed the barriers to employment that they experienced post-release: *"There's a stereotype because of my criminal record, I can't deal with people because I was caught with drugs and being violent with the Gardaí. And all that stuff eventually adds up . . . if employers see that they'll be put off, you know?"* (Bryan, 24, Phase 2). Additionally, those who reported low social support and weak family connections told of the difficulties they faced when trying to find employment in the absence of trusted adults who might be able to direct them towards potential employment opportunities: *"It is nearly harder to find one* [a job], *you know what I mean, because you could say to your dad or something, 'Keep a look out for me' or your mam*

would hear that someone needs help with the garden or something. You don't get things like that [when you grow up in care]*"* (Christopher, 18, Phase 2).

Non-participation in education, training and employment negatively impacted young people's sense of self-worth and also reinforced their socio-economic marginalisation. Indeed, many felt that their ability to study and/or work was constantly undermined and that they were disadvantaged by the consequent lack of structure, routine and social interaction in their lives.

> *"It's a bit of a sad, miserable fucking existence really, do you know what I mean. I'm not doing nothing like I'm just wasting a life, a fucking life away, that's all it's doing."* (Michael, 25, Phase 2)

> *"I have to get a job. I'm sick of sitting around doing nothing, sitting out on the streets.* [Getting a job] *will help me communicate more with people as well, do you know what I mean? You're going to be in a place with loads of people every day. I need to get into a routine of waking up early as well because I'm always sleeping kind of during the day . . . just bored."* (Seán, 19, Phase 2)

A majority of the study's young people depended on social welfare payments, such as jobseekers allowance, illness and disability payments and supplementary welfare allowance. One young man who was residing in a residential care setting was receiving 'pocket money' and various allowances (for clothing, for example). The financial challenges that most young people faced were significant and particularly acute for those who had fallen into rent arrears and/or who had children in their care: *"I'm trying my best with it like but it's hard like with a baby on the way"* (Phoebe, 25, Phase 2); *"It doesn't really* [last] *. . . €100 like, for me that goes in two days,* [then] *nothing, you're broke"* (Seán, 19, Phase 2).

Conversely, the small number of young people who were employed by Phase 2 of the study reported that a steady income had greatly enhanced their ability to live independently.

> *"It's* [employment] *helped me big time. Like the little things, that if I was only on €100 I wouldn't be able to buy that, but now I'm able to buy stuff for my child, buy stuff for my girlfriend, buy stuff for myself, I'm able to look after myself and stuff like that, do you know what I mean."* (Simon, 21, Phase 2)

> *"I think that's probably one of the key things for anybody that's in a hostel—instead of concentrating so much on getting them housed, they should concentrate on getting them a job.* [Working] *leaves me with plenty of money to kind of, to survive, my shopping, everything else. It's unbelievable."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

"At the start I was struggling and then I got the job, now we're grand, on top of bills, everything and there's enough money left at the end of the week." (Sinéad, 21, Phase 2)

Young people, such as those quoted above, repeatedly emphasised their greater sense of financial independence while also articulating feelings of 'liberation' from the restrictions of social welfare systems: *"I've been paying me own way. I even feel more independent because I'm off social welfare. I never thought a day in my life would come that I would be off it like!"* (Alison, 21, Phase 2); *"There's no comparison, never in my life will I go back on rent allowance. I'm happy that I'm paying for me rent, I'm happy that I'm paying"* (Paul, 23, Phase 2). These participants were also more likely to report increased self-esteem, self-worth and confidence as well as a sense of personal direction, achievement and agency, as Paul and his mother, Teresa, explained.

"Years ago like I relied on other people, scrounging off people. So [working is] *brilliant, absolutely brilliant. It's nice to be able to just have money, to have a bit of a purpose to get up . . . I'm never worried about food, I never worry about having money, the rent will be paid. It's not very often that I'm upset or in a bad mood* [anymore]*, I'm just always—I just feel good all the time."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

"I think two main [positive] *things would be work and having the roof over his head, his own place to stay. It seems pretty basic to most people but yeah. You know, for him I think it was just having money to actually have a life like, he has a social life, he has friends, you know, he can do things. I think he feels like he has got a life now whereas before he didn't."* (Teresa, Paul's mother, Phase 2)

In general, young people viewed education as a critical enabler and as an essential prerequisite to labour market participation. Yet, many were detached from education and training systems and/or faced significant barriers of access to educational and training programmes. Employment opportunities were exceptionally limited for a majority of the study's young people, with unemployment—and their continued reliance on social welfare systems—creating significant obstacles to their ability to become self-reliant, irrespective of their housing situations by Phase 2 of the study.

Family Relationship Transitions

Young people's level of contact with family members fluctuated and changed over the course of the study. A large number reported temporary periods of disengagement from their families due, for example, to: periods of incarceration; not being permitted visits from family members when

residing in homelessness services; exclusion from their local neighbour-hoods; poor mental health or 'bouts' of depression; residential upheavals and changing living location; ongoing tension and/or conflict with one or more family members; or during periods when young people did not want to inform parents of specific set-backs such as job loss, terminating their participation in a training course or drug or alcohol relapse: *"I didn't want them* [family] *to see how bad things had got* [referring to drug and alcohol use]. *So I blanked them"* (Sarah, 23, Phase 1).

Periods of low familial contact also frequently coincided with increased movement between, or returns to, unstable living situations or emergency service settings because returning home was not an option and support from a family member(s) was largely absent. These young people were more likely to remain in insecure accommodation for longer periods of time and their accounts typically exposed a distinct lack of material, emotional and financial resources: *"I ended up on* [non-prescribed] *tablets and all and I wasn't talking to any of my family or that* [so] *I went back to* [under-18s 'out of home' provision]*"* (Aaron, 18, Phase 2).

Others, however, reported periods of increased contact with family members at particular junctures such as when they needed advice, infor-mation or support in relation to specific difficulties (whether personal, financial or emotional), when they learned of a pregnancy or following the birth of a child: *"I ended up moving back to me mother's house when I found out I was pregnant she took the opportunity up and so did I. I just wanted to go home"* (Fiona, 21, Phase 2). The process of renewing fractured or strained family relationships, however, was typically described as a com-plex and incremental one: *"I've had complications with the family but we've worked around them"* (Simon, 21, Phase 2); *"*[Families] *are always difficult, they're always complicated, but that's I think the meaning of family, in my eyes"* (Paul, 23, Phase 2). In cases where familial reconnection was reported, positive developments of this nature were frequently attributed to a whole range of experiences or events including: both family members and young people becoming more 'mature'; increased face-to-face contact; establish-ing a balance between distance and closeness in order to better manage family relationships; participating in training courses and engaging with employment opportunities; or moving away from emergency homeless-ness services and/or reducing substance use.

> *"When she* [mother] *came into town when I wasn't doing well* [referring to when he was living in homelessness services]*, we'd nothing to talk about but how shit*

my life was . . . it was negative all the time. Because I think I'm kind of more responsible now I can have the craic with my mam, it's not always such a serious note, it's nice and laid back, she can come up here [private rented accommodation] *and have a cup of coffee and we'll just chill out and chat away about stupid things, you know what I mean. It's nice."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

Significantly, reconciliation with family members had sometimes occurred in instances where, at Phase 1, young people reported that mending family bonds did not seem possible. Ashley, for instance, repeatedly emphasised that she did not perceive future reconciliation to be a realistic option when we spoke with her for the first time.

"Like me and Mam, I don't think we're ever going to speak again. Like it's that bad, like I could not be around my mam. That bridge has been burned. Like very badly, just no going back to that bridge. There was never a relationship there to begin with and now it's just completely gone." (Ashley, 19, Phase 1)

However, by the time of her follow-up interview approximately two years later, she told that her relationship with her mother had changed dramatically in a positive sense. Like others, she acknowledged the role of distance, maturation and improved communication on both their parts in facilitating and maintaining their renewed relationship.

"I think the distance helped a lot, especially now me having my own life and her kind of having her own life as well has helped a lot. It's a lot better . . . more grown up, I suppose. Before it was more . . . just could never get along. But now we have a different relationship completely, even since we got back talking. She talks to me a lot different and we have different conversations than we would have had before. It's great to feel like I have them [family] *to go to now again."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

Renewed relationships, as well as a sense of connectedness with family members and positive family contact and support, emerged as an important enabler in that it provided essential practical and emotional support to 'out of home' youth who were living with a great deal of uncertainty.[1] Family support instilled a sense of safety, security and belonging in young people, who felt cared for despite the fact that they were not living with their families. Indeed, many described feelings of having achieved a new 'position' and sense of direction following familial reconciliation: *"To be honest, I didn't think I'd ever be as happy as I am now that I'm back with my family . . . There's no better feeling"* (Bryan, 24, Phase 2). Narratives such as these emphasised the emotional, symbolic and enduring importance that

[1] The role of family support in helping young people to exit homelessness and move towards more independent accommodation is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

young people attached to family and family ties; these participants viewed family as a cornerstone to the resolution of their homelessness and/or difficulties associated with housing instability, even in circumstances where a return to the family home was not considered to be a realistic option.

The Transition to Parenthood

As outlined in Chapter 3, six young people (including five young women and one young man) were parents at Phase 1 of the study. A further six participants had become parents at Phase 2 of the study and an additional three young people were expectant parents. Eleven of these young people were caring for their children while four reported that their child was either in long-term foster care (n = 1) or in the care of their ex-partner (n = 3) (see Table 3.4 in Chapter 3 for a detailed breakdown of the living situations of those young people who were parents). In a majority of cases, pregnancies were unexpected and unplanned: *"I was shocked . . . nervous at first and I didn't know what to do, what to expect"* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2). Practically all of these young people described the experience of 'being' or becoming a parent as a significant 'turning point' that had a profound and positive transformative impact on their lives.

> "[Life has] *improved in a lot of ways, I'm clean, I have a baby, she's amazing and she probably saved my life."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

> "Having [daughter], *having to support somebody else, rather than just myself, to make decisions for a baby, it's just so different. I don't just worry about myself anymore; I have a little baby to worry about."* (Sinéad, 21, Phase 2)

> "My life has a bit more . . . like more or a bit of meaning, you know? It's not just me I'm providing for anymore, I've a little one to look after so I've to put her* [daughter] *first."* (Simon, 21, Phase 2)

As outlined in Chapter 3, only five of the study's young parents were housed independently (in private rented sector or local authority housing). A further three (all young women) had returned home but all three described their living situations as unsustainable because of overcrowding and/or home-based tensions. Seven young parents were 'houseless' or living in situations of 'hidden' homelessness.

The transition to motherhood/fatherhood in the absence of stable accommodation was always described as difficult and distressing and this was particularly the case for those young people who were accessing homelessness services that they viewed as inappropriate or unsafe: *"I'm just in*

constant stress about having nowhere to live while also thinking of the baby, things need to improve for her as well" (Maria, 26, Phase 2). Peter spoke about the stress and anxiety he and his partner had experienced while living in adult hostels throughout the duration of her pregnancy: *"It wasn't nice really because the drugs were everywhere like . . . I just kept going up every second week with letters from the* [hospital] *saying she* [partner] *needs a clean place, she needs somewhere to stay, somewhere for when the baby comes"* (Peter, 24, Phase 2).

Similarly, those with experiences of living in prolonged situations of 'hidden' homelessness (that is, living temporarily in the homes of friends or family members) with their children repeatedly emphasised their concerns in relation to meeting their children's needs generally, as well as the negative impact that a lack of consistency, stability and security may have on their children, in particular: *"The baby is not settled. The baby is never, ever going to get comfortable and like with seven people in the house* [referring to the home of his partner's mother]*, you know what I mean, all these different faces, the noise of them all"* (Shane, 19, Phase 2). A majority of these young people viewed their current living situation as untenable in the longer-term and often spoke at length about their worries about 'what's going to happen next' in relation to sourcing appropriate housing for their family: *"Just all the stress of being homeless and bringing a new baby into the world, didn't know where I was going to live, didn't know if she was going into care"* (Sinéad, 21, Phase 2). Sarah—who was living in a B&B at the time of her follow-up interview—had placed her child into voluntary care and, like others, described the traumatic experience of parent-child separation.

> *"*[Placing daughter in care] *is still hard, it's the hardest thing I'll ever do in my life … being a mother but not feeling like one, not getting to be one, you know, it's like I have a daughter but I'm not a mother because I'm not doing the motherly things."* (Sarah, 25, Phase 2)

The experience of parenting was depicted as markedly different by those young people who were living in more stable accommodation and/or reported regular contact with family members who provided them with significant emotional and material support: *"Well it was just a bit scary like, you know, not knowing what to do . . . my first child like so, I'm sure it's the same for everyone you know? But we have so much support that it's been grand. Anything we need or to ask or stuff like that there's people to go to. Like* [partner's aunt]*, my family, everyone"* (Simon, 21, Phase 2). These young people (five in total) typically stressed that secure housing had bolstered

their ability to cope with the challenging transition to parenthood: *"Like your children are used to their own home, their own room . . . They are a lot more settled and they're more comfortable . . . they're not going anywhere and they're safe"* (Collette, 22, Phase 2). Ashley was nine months pregnant and living in private rental accommodation at the time of her Phase 2 interview and was due to move to a different private rented sector dwelling with her partner that was more suited to their needs as a young family. She explained that, with her housing situation resolved, she now felt "ready" and "prepared" for the birth of her child.

> *"I was more shocked because, especially because I was in a one-bed at the time I found out* [about the pregnancy]. *And it was just, obviously at first like anyone, you're just a bit nervous, but now the past few months I've been getting everything sorted so everything's falling into place. We finally have our house and everything now so I'm completely, like I feel ready now. I just want him* [child] *here, I'm prepared now."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

The challenges associated with parenting in the absence of secure accommodation were significant for all of the study's young parents and the accounts of these young people contrasted sharply with those who had transitioned to stable housing with their child(ren). Pregnancy and parent-hood brought about significant changes in the young people's lives, as well as anxiety and stress associated with their limited financial resources. Yet, becoming a parent was depicted by a majority as having given a new sense of purpose and meaning to their lives.

From Homelessness to 'Home'

As outlined in the previous chapter, only a small number of young people had either exited homelessness or experienced brief periods of housing stability by Phase 2 of the study. However, these young people identified the transition from homelessness to stable living situations as a significant 'turning point' in their lives that had distinct and personally significant effects on their sense of 'self' and 'place'. The notion of 'home' was strongly associated with a feelings of security and predictability in housing which, in turn, appeared to positively impact young people's sense of independence and autonomy: *"Knowing that I was going to be out* [of homelessness], *it meant something. It meant I have a good base I can go to, me own space"* (Oisín, 26, Phase 2). Feelings of having achieved (greater) security and certainty in their lives was particularly apparent in the narratives of young people—all young women with young children—who had been allocated local authority housing and signed a long-term lease: *"I signed for this* [local

authority] *house for five years"* (Collette, 22, Phase 2). Indeed, these young women tended to view their housing as permanent and often described their dwelling as a "home": *"I'm staying here now, this is it. Very happy, this is going to be my home for the rest of my life really I suppose, my family home"* (Sinéad, 22, Phase 2).

Many spoke about the importance of the space, privacy and comfort that stable housing had provided, often pointing out that it had enabled them to feel 'in control' of their lives. These young people frequently articulated a sense of accomplishment, strongly associated with the perceived positives of having moved away from homelessness (and other) services, agencies or institutional settings where they felt that their independence and autonomy had been undermined: *"I feel like I'm living me life now. I'm not being babied or I'm not having someone controlling every single thing I do"* (Paul, 23, Phase 2). Ashley, for example, had been living in private rented accommodation for just over one year when we met with her for the second time. At Phase 2, she reflected on the move out of homelessness and the ways in which this transition had enabled her to 'start over' and re-claim a sense of ownership over her daily life.

> *"Living kind of away from the services, you get to choose who you're around and so it's a lot different. It* [referring to her time in services] *was obviously what I needed at the time. But now, I wouldn't go back to it. I'm happy renting, I'm happy having my own space and still obviously linking in with staff is a good thing, but I'm happy to be away from hostels . . . I feel more normal. You can kind of do your own thing, have your own life. It's a lot better."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

Furthermore, housing stability engendered a sense of belonging and self-acceptance: *"People in the past told me I was kind of, I guess, a homeless person, and then if they see me now I have my own accommodation and they just think like, 'He is doing well, he has his own place now'"* (Raphael, 24, Phase 2). The emphasis and symbolic importance placed by these young people on being perceived as "normal", particularly in terms of their position in the wider community, was also significant.

> *"It's nice to able to bring people into your house, and for them to be like, 'Oh your house is lovely', and I'd say, 'Oh thanks'. It just feels good. I feel comfortable. Like I just feel so normal."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

> *"Everything is normal. It's how it should be like. A daily routine and when you close the door, you know you can come back when you feel like it and there is nobody going to be telling you to be back at such a time."* (Collette, 22, Phase 2)

Many who were housed by Phase 2 articulated an awareness of the stigma associated with homelessness: *"Even though it's not who I am today, it's not something I want to talk about to people I know how judgemental people can be"* (Paul, 23, Phase 2). In response, several had actively sought to distance themselves from homelessness services and agencies as they attempted to forge a new 'identity' and move toward a more independent lifestyle, as Bryan and Chloe explained.

> *"No, I haven't been in touch with any services. It's not that . . . I think by now . . . by using the services now it would be going against everything that I'm for now. I'm renting privately. I've divided myself from the services, from the housing authority and I've also divided myself from my housing needs or whatever you want to call it."* (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)

> *"I'm a lot more independently able. Like I do everything on* (pause)*, on my own, like as in I don't seek* [services'] *help as much. I wouldn't be in contact with anyone like that. So I feel like I might be more of an adult in that sense that like I can kind of—I can deal with most things myself. Like I wouldn't ring them until I was pretty desperate."* (Chloe, 24, Phase 2)

The stability and changed sense of 'position' that typically accompanied the move to secure housing appeared to help young people to not only come to terms with and make sense of their past experiences, but also, to perceive themselves as competent and responsible young adults, establish new connections, build positive relationships and make informed decisions about their futures. Reflecting on his past experience and the positive developments that had occurred in his life since the time of his baseline interview, Paul felt that he has "come a long way" and expressed pride in his achievements.

> *"It's crazy to think, I didn't even think I'd fucking live to be twenty-five. Swear to God, I don't think a lot of people did. To be where I am now, I'm just happy, just thankful, grateful, you know what I mean. Where before I just took things for granted and didn't care. It kind of makes me realise again, refreshes my memory, 'Jesus I have come a long way', I should be proud of myself."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

Paul's mother, Teresa, also acknowledged the positive impact that residential stability has had on both Paul's and her own mental health and wellbeing.

> *"Like things are a hundred times better than they were like two years ago. Now I kind of, I feel, I've kind of relaxed a little bit, you know, I can breathe again."* (Teresa, Paul's mother, Phase 2)

Housing provided young people with a sense of ontological security, a stable base from which to plan for the future and and a sense of connectedness with local community and society more broadly. Put differently, housing was seen by many as "a vehicle for gaining independence and an escape from negative pasts" (Brueckner *et al.*, 2011: 8).

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate the complex array of overlapping events, circumstances and transitions—beyond those associated directly with housing, yet deeply connected to their routes to housing—experienced by the study's young people. The range of personal, social, educational, familial and economic transitions reported were significant and also influenced their homelessness and housing trajectories over time.

Peers featured centrally in young people's accounts of daily life and, by Phase 2 of the study, many viewed the management of their peer networks and disassociation from perceived stigmatised spaces (including homelessness service settings and/or street 'scenes') as playing an important role in their ability to deal with negative past experiences and move towards an independent lifestyle. Equally, they identified positive family relationships and access to educational opportunities and labour market participation as central to their capacity to exit homelessness. However, a majority of the study's young people faced significant, ongoing barriers to educational opportunities and labour market participation.

Twelve of the 29 young people (over 40%) who participated in a follow-up interview were parents and only five of these young people (four young women and one young man) were housed independently. Pregnancy and parenting presented many challenges, particularly for those young people who were living in homelessness services. Nonetheless, what is very apparent from these young people's narratives was their commitment to parenting and the extent to which they strived to better their lives and provide stability for their children.

The findings presented in this chapter point to the dynamic, fluid and changing nature of family and family relationships, demonstrating the symbolic and enduring importance that young people attach to family bonds and the practical, material and emotional supports that they can provide. Significant also was that although a return home was not a realistic option for some young people, family reunification was nonethe-

less possible in many cases, particularly with the passing of time. Indeed, familial reconciliation was reported by a number who had perceived the resolution of family difficulties not to be possible at Phase 1.

Finally, the findings help to illuminate the ways in which homeless young people attempt to negotiate the experience of 'home' and home occupancy, highlighting the complexity and diversity of their individual needs as well as the varying ways in which they managed and made sense of these 'identity' transitions as they navigated a route to stable housing.

Chapter 6: Young People Negotiating
A Route To Stable Housing

Routes to housing stability were unpredictable and often precarious for young people and, as documented in Chapter 4, only a minority had exited homelessness by Phase 2 of the study. This chapter examines how young people navigated a landscape that presented some opportunities— but a far greater number of barriers and risks—as they sought a route out of homelessness. It begins by exploring the dynamics of accessing housing, highlighting a number of experiences and mechanisms that facilitated an exit from homelessness. The focus then shifts to an exploration of young people's experiences *in* housing, documenting the array of economic, social and personal circumstances that can pose a threat to young people's ability to maintain housing, and block or thwart a route to housing stability.

Exiting Homelessness: The Dynamics of Accessing Housing

Just seven young people (24%) had exited homelessness and were housed by Phase 2 of the study, although there were others who had exited temporarily but subsequently returned to homelessness services. For those young people who were housed by Phase 2—and all who had exited homelessness temporarily over the course of the study—the process of securing housing was protracted and invariably depicted as challenging: *"I had to fight hard. I'd be ringing them* [services] *every day, 'Is there anything there? Please help me out'"* (Collette, 22, Phase 2). This section explores some of the key dynamics driving young people's 'journeys' out of homelessness, focusing in particular on the role of family and formal (professional) support systems. Separate attention is dedicated to young people with histories of State care, whose accounts of seeking a route out of homelessness frequently referenced particular vulnerabilities and needs. The section closes by examining the process of achieving relative stability—particularly in relation to substance use and mental health—as a perceived enabler to exiting homelessness.

Young People's Support Systems: The Role of Family and Family Relationships

As documented in Chapters 4 and 5, a number of young people (n = 15) reported a marked improvement in their relationships and level of contact with family members, particularly with their parent(s) and siblings, by Phase 2. These renewed family relationships provided important supports that not only boosted their confidence and sense of self-worth, but also provided a 'safety net', particularly during times of crisis.

Some family members, for example, provided short-term accommodation at particular junctures, often at key transition points. For some young people, a temporary stay in the home of a family member had provided a 'break' from the perceived chaos of homeless service settings and the opportunity to save enough money for a rental deposit. In this sense, the ability to return home temporarily facilitated easier access to a highly competitive rental market and, for a number, a speedier exit from homelessness. Paul, for example, had reconnected and stayed with a family member for several months following a prolonged period spent moving between emergency service settings, alcohol treatment facilities and insecure housing. While living with this family member, he experienced greater stability in his day-to-day life and was also able to work and save enough money to enter private rented accommodation. He subsequently moved into a house share where he had been living for over a year when we met with him for the second time: *"I saved up a deposit, I literally rang this place, I came and viewed it, I got the call, 'Oh we'd be happy enough for you to move in'"* (Paul, 23, Phase 2).

Like Paul, several others told that the financial assistance provided by a family member(s) had been critical in helping them to access and maintain housing: *"I got about €100 from me sisters bringing* [it] *down to me* [to access private rented accommodation]. *And then we'll sort out the deposit next weekend"* (Oisín, 26, Phase 2). Similarly, Sarah, who had spent more than a year alternating between sleeping rough and moving between homeless hostels and B&Bs, explained that the material support provided by family members had been important at the point of moving to a local authority apartment: *"They* [family] *bought me a few little bits and all to just kind of . . . because the place was so big and how am I ever going to fill this, I only have bags! I couldn't afford it even with the grant, just couldn't afford it"* (Sarah, 25, Phase 2). She went on to note that, without this support, she would have felt overwhelmed and unable to cope with the move to independent living: *"I wouldn't have been able to do that all on my own, not a hope in hell.*

I wouldn't have known where to start. I think I would have panicked so much that I would have messed it up. I would have just lost it" (Sarah, 25, Phase 2).

Reports of this kind were common among those who indicated that they had positive relationships with family members and highlight the ways in which family connections offered at least some young people support in difficult circumstances, particularly in terms of accessing and navigating a route to stable housing. Family connectedness of this nature also appeared to instil a sense of safety, security and belonging in young people, who felt cared for despite the fact that they were not living with their families. Indeed, many described feelings of having achieved a new 'position' and sense of direction following familial reconciliation. In the following account Bryan, who was living in a house share at the time of follow up, described the importance of family support in helping him to break the cycle of service use.

> "It was only when I got my family support that I was able to pull myself out of homeless services. Like being in touch with your family can actually stop you from going out and using drugs or tapping [begging] . . . I don't think I'd be on such good grounds without it. Like when you're not on solid ground you can start to feel like everything's crumbling, I have my family support and that's good enough for me now." (Bryan, 23, Phase 2)

Family contact also appeared to play a significant role in shaping some of the young people's housing trajectories in more direct ways in that it facilitated a return home. Three of the young women interviewed at Phase 2 had exited services and returned to live at home with their mothers after learning of a pregnancy. One of these young women, Fiona, had been homeless for almost five months at Phase 1—and was moving between the homes of friends and family members, adult ETAs and STAs—due to ongoing relationship difficulites with her mother. At Phase 2, she told that she and her mother had resolved many of their difficulties and jointly made the decision that she would move home: *"I ended up moving back to me mother's house when I found out I was pregnant, she* [mother] *took the opportunity up and so did I. I just wanted to go home"* (Fiona, 21, Phase 2).

The role of family support and reconciliation in bolstering their attempts to exit homelessness differed between young people. Perhaps importantly, both young people and the family members interviewed often stated that while they deeply valued their family relationships, a longer-term or permanent return to the family home or home of a relative was not in fact desirable. This was often due to issues related to space constraints, young

people's desire for autonomy and independence and/or long-standing relationship difficulties that required a level of distance in order to manage them in their day-to-day lives.

> "[It's] *a hectic house* [referring to her family home]. *No space for yourself to be comfortable and stuff . . . It's just I want me own comfort."* (Fiona, 21, Phase 2)

> "*Because I don't live with her now* [referring to her mother]*, it's a lot less stressful on both of us. We have that break; we're not in each other's faces like we were before that we constantly clashed. So now I can visit her, and she can visit me and everything, it's a better relationship. I think the distance helped a lot."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

> "[Returning home] *would be a no-go, no. It would definitely not work, no way."* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)

However, even if young people felt that a return home was not a viable or sustainable option, either in the short or longer term, a sense of connectedness with family emerged as providing important material and practical supports, an enhanced sense of well-being and also bolstered young people's perceived ability to secure and maintain housing.

Professional Assistance and Formal Support Structures

As outlined in Chapter 4, a number of young people reported positive connections, experiences and relationships with various service professionals (including key workers, aftercare workers, social workers, support service personnel, and so on): *"When you are homeless and you feel like you have no one, one staff member taking five minutes* [to show] *that they care, you know, it makes such a difference"* (Maria, 26, Phase 2). Supportive measures and interventions on the part of service staff were identified by a number of young people as important in enabling them to move towards housing stability. These supports included practical assistance (such as helping young people to look for accommodation and to arrange viewings, preparing them to interact and negotiate with landlords, assisting with paperwork and filling in forms and providing references for prospective letting agents); advocacy and legal support (regarding their rights as tenants, assisting with the process of acquiring local authority housing and providing assistance with dealing with landlords); and advice and guidance on how to access various welfare assistance payments, grants and schemes (such as, for example, aftercare packages, the Housing Assistance Payment and rent supplement).

"It's only been recently we've seen them a lot [referring to staff on a housing sup-port team]*, especially with everything going on* [referring to difficulties with an estate agent]*, we have needed their support and they know what to do."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

Oisín had moved to private rented accommodation by Phase 2 and told that service providers had helped him to source private rented sector accommodation.

"I'd go over to [homelessness advice and information service] *and use the phones, check for houses and all* [online]*, but nothing ever came up, they were sold or they were gone. So a* [staff member] *just said, 'We're not leaving this until you get set up'. And I got a tip off the landlord, there was this one* [rental property] *left, jumped on it, so . . . yeah, chuffed."* (Oisín, 26, Phase 2)

Interactions and relationship of the kind described by Oisín helped to foster a sense of personal direction, autonomy and empowerment in young people who, with the support of service providers, began to feel that they had some level of control over their lives and, particularly, over 'what's going to happen next'. Service professionals also sometimes provided emo-tional support and personal encouragement. Warren spoke at length about the protracted process of trying to access housing and recalled a difficult period when he felt disheartened and wanted to 'give up': *"Every single day I was going out looking* [for places] *three to four every day I was"* (Warren, 26, Phase 2). However, he repeatedly remarked on the support he received from various staff members in a homelessness organisation with sourcing accommodation, which eventually led to him exiting homelessness services and entering private rented housing for a six-month period.

"All of them [staff] *like that's one thing I have to say about the* [organisation]*, they keep on helping you if you want a place they will keep on looking for you . . . like once you just show them that you have the will power, you're willing to move on, like they don't want you to be in a home or a hostel like."* (Warren, 26, Phase 2)

Reliable, person-centred support appeared to not only strengthen service engagement and engender a sense of trust, safety and security in young people, but also acted as an important buffer to the negative impact of residential instability; these relationships also allowed professionals to provide practical guidance and assistance and emotional support, par-ticularly during times of crisis. Since the time of her baseline interview, Ashley, for example—who was nine months pregnant by Phase 2—had been assisted by a dedicated housing team to move from an STA to private rented accommodation, where she had been living for just under one year

at the time of follow up: *"They* [housing team] *mainly help you move because you're still kind of under their care, I suppose, like they're there for support . . . They gave us a very good reference"* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2).

From Care to Housing: The Role of Professional Supports

A smaller number of participants with histories of State care similarly noted high levels of engagement with social work or aftercare services. Some of these young people described positive connections with service professionals that had enabled them to source stable accommodation as well as additional financial assistance provided through social welfare payments, aftercare packages and various grants (such as, for example, for schooling/education, clothing and so on). Christopher—who had turned 18 years of age and was preparing to leave residential care by the time of his follow-up interview—described the ongoing support he was receiving from his aftercare worker.

> *"Like as soon as anything comes up* [for rent] *the aftercare worker would be straight on the phone to me like, 'Chris, come on, we'll go out and view this' . . . So, you get an apartment and they* [referring to Tusla] *pay the rent and all that and you get like, it is not the dole, it is just a package, an aftercare package. And then you can get grants and stuff for school and they pay for school, college, you have your medical card . . . It is good. Well, except for the fact that they can't really find anywhere* [referring to rental property] *in* [county name]. *There's not a lot of apartments but they will find somewhere eventually."* (Christopher, 18, Phase 2)

Alan, another participant with a care history, had experienced high levels of stress since his Phase 1 interview, having constantly moved between STAs, bedsits and the homes of friends of family members: *"I don't even remember the amount of places I moved to like since* [Phase 1]*"* (Alan, 19, Phase 2). He was living temporarily in the home of his mother's friend when we met him for the second time and considered himself to be homeless because he did not have a fixed address. However, he told that he had recently learned that he had been offered a two-year placement in a residential aftercare service arranged by his aftercare worker.

> *"Then just the other day like I got a phone call, me aftercare worker just rang me saying she had good news that I could move in next week, that was last week like. And then she was on the phone to me yesterday, I've to meet her tomorrow now and meet them and start like a direct debit or something and I can move in."* (Alan, 19, Phase 2)

Alan went on to explain that he now feels more optimistic about his future: *"I felt good like. I was getting a bit depressed because, like, I was going*

to have to save up then and live in me mate's house. So like I was feeling like shit but then she [aftercare worker] *rang me and me mood just changed"* (Alan, 19, Phase 2).

Engagement with dedicated statutory and non-statutory aftercare services and professionals certainly appeared to create a more planned move towards housing stability for some young people who were ageing out of the care system. However, it is important to note that in cases where aftercare support was not available or young people did not meet the eligibility criteria for aftercare provision, they experienced significant difficulties as they attempted to navigate the transition from child to adult services: *"You are coming from being a child to an adult clear onto the homeless and then the homeless system. It makes you go off your rocker"* (Ross, 19, Phase 2). Abigail and Shane told that they had left step-down and semi-independent residential aftercare services, respectively, with no 'move on' accommodation in place at the time of their departure. Both immediately entered into prolonged situations of 'hidden' homelessness and were staying in overcrowded conditions in the homes of their partners' family by Phase 2 of the study.

> *"We were supposed to be there* [referring to aftercare step-down accommodation] *only nine months, and we were there for two years. So we were given a date to leave, and because I wasn't in education I wasn't* [being given] *any help. So I was told that the privilege was for people in education, and not for people that are earning their own money. So since then I've been between houses. I can't stay in me mam's. It's just too—you can't live there—so I'm in-between friend's and my boyfriend's* [family homes] *like once a week, but his house is really, really full."* (Abigail, 21, Phase 2)

> *"They* [staff] *gave me a date to move out and then I had a meeting with the manager and I said, 'Listen', I said, 'If you are going to throw me into a hostel do it.' I said, 'I have no place to move* [to]*' and they pushed my date back then to, I think, July and in July they gave me a date. Her* [referring to partner's] *ma was good enough to let me move in."* (Shane, 19, Phase 2)

These young people invariably depicted their entry into situations of 'hidden' homelessness as a retrograde step.

> *"It's hard. It's really tiring like. It's really annoying because I wouldn't have thought this time last year that I would be where I am today. I thought I was done with all this. And I don't know. Like if I had a reason to be doing all this. Like, if it was my fault, I'd be like, 'OK fair enough', you know, 'I deserve this', but other than that it's fucking annoying."* (Abigail, 21, Phase 2)

Aftercare services provided important supports to young people both ahead of exiting the care system and subsequent to making that transition. However, it appears that aftercare provision was not experienced uniformly by young people, which led a number to feeling unsupported as they exited the care system and also led them into situations of 'hidden' homelessness and housing precariousness.

Finding (Relative) Stability as a Route to Stable Housing

"Life is so much easier when you are not running around looking for where you are going to sleep tonight." (Sarah, 25, Phase 2)

Moves towards greater stability in housing were facilitated, in a number of cases, by developments and events that enabled young people to more effectively manage various instabilities in their lives. Significantly, the ability to address issues—related to, for example, substance misuse and mental ill-health—was significantly bolstered by low levels of mobility. In other words, when young people reported low levels of movement between various forms of unstable and/or temporary living situations and secured longer-term accommodation in a youth-oriented STA or aftercare residential setting, they appeared to be better able to manage their daily lives.

"Just to have a bed can change everything. It can just change your whole view on life just knowing that you have a bed because that's all it took for me. As soon as I got that bit of stability [referring to a six-month placement in an STA] *it was just—I hit the ground running to get off everything* [referring to illicit drug use] *and the staff kept me busy."* (Sarah, 25, Phase 2)

"I have my own space, my own room. I can breathe and it's permanent; I can be in when I want like. I have somewhere to go during the day rather than just being out all the time which just leads to me drinking, charge sheets and all that, do you know what I mean?" (Ross, 19, Phase 2)

Some young people appeared to have benefited from a period(s) of respite from sleeping rough and/or accessing hostel accommodation. Sophie's mental health had hit "rock bottom" during a period she spent sleeping rough with her partner: *"My mental health was at rock bottom like, I felt like I was taking a nervous breakdown or something. You know like that, I felt like I just couldn't take it anymore"* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2). She was admitted to a psychiatric hospital where she experienced a short period of residential security which, in turn, facilitated speedier access to a short-term placement in an STA.

Q: *"Did you feel it helped you being in there [psychiatric hospital]?"*

A: *"Oh yeah, like just getting proper things into you and all, like, having a break-fast, a proper meal, you know, somewhere warm and all. I needed just, I needed someone to talk to like . . . I got a letter* [from the hospital] *and we went up to* [homelessness placement service]*, we ended up getting a* [short-term placement in STA]*."* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)

Both young people and their family members were keen to point out that a reliable place to stay also permitted young people to focus their attention on effectively engaging with services, attending meetings/ appointments and sourcing secure housing in the longer-term rather than having to concentrate their time and efforts on finding somewhere to sleep on a nightly basis: *"Things were getting a little bit better there* [STA] *and she* [Maria] *was secure in where she was living so I think that helped her greatly as well. I think living in the one place and being settled there and, you know . . . somewhere that they're not thrown out after a few weeks"* (Geraldine, Maria's mother, Phase 2). Like others, Oisín, who was living in private rented accommodation by Phase 2, discussed the challenge of sourcing indepen-dent living arrangements while entrenched in a homeless 'lifestyle'.

"Everything was hectic [referring to when he was sleeping rough]. *Like I was making an appointment for half three with someone, but it's hard to keep track of dates and meetings and stuff. Like it's—you don't know what day it is, you don't know what time it is . . .* [Just trying] *to keep warm at the end of the day. I know it's only a bed like in a shared house* [referring to current accommodation]*, but it's mine. It's not like 9 o'clock in the morning or half 8 in the morning and getting kicked out. And you're not back in town that night. The stuff you can get done in that day . . . "* (Oisín, 26, Phase 2)

A number of young people had successfully reduced or ceased what they had described as 'problematic' substance use at Phase 1 of the study: *"I'm not on drugs* [anymore]. *I'm only on forty-five mils of methadone. I'm more calm in me self, I'm after quieting down, getting more mature. I'm just more relaxed"* (Warren, 26, Phase 2). Several had accessed residential or community-based drug/alcohol treatment or had availed of detoxification services while incarcerated while, for others, learning of a pregnancy provided the motivation to cease or curb their drug and/or alcohol use. In cases where young people's engagement with treatment services was successful, many characterised these periods as a significant 'turning point' in their lives: *"I got a lot of things back because of it* [treatment]*, obviously the likes of my family and I just, I felt confident in myself. [It] helped me in so many ways"* (Paul, 23, Phase 2).

Significantly, those who reported low(er)-level support needs in terms of their drug/alcohol use and/or mental health were more likely to report greater stability of housing at the time of follow up. Sarah, who had been accessing emergency hostels on a night-by-night basis at the time of the baseline study, had not used drugs (referring to a combination of non-prescribed medication, cocaine, cannabis and alcohol) in over a year by the time of her Phase 2 interview. Like others, she talked about the enabling impact that abstinence from drug use had had on her life: *"I've learned an awful lot since I got off drugs. I'm slowly but surely getting there"* (Sarah, 25, Phase 2). Sarah also reported increased engagement with education and training programmes as well as housing and homelessness service providers, which had bolstered her self-confidence and sense of empowerment.

> *"I was doing the course, I was off drugs; I was showing stability paying rent every week. I had all my priorities kind of together. So they* [services] *put me forward* [for housing] *and it was just two days before* [date] *I got accepted. Without them* [services]*, like they moved me out of that into better places and from there I just kept going forward."* (Sarah, 25, Phase 2)

Accounts such as these suggest that residential stability alongside reduced substance consumption (often following a period of engagement with alcohol and/or drug treatment services), improved mental health and participation in education and/or training programmes and employment opportunities, introduced a greater measure of certainty into the day-to-day lives of some young people. These participants were more likely to report speedier, smoother and more stable moves to independent living situations as well as a sense of personal direction and feelings of purpose, security and agency.

Experiences *in* Housing: Exploring The Contours of Housing (In)stability

Young people's experiences in housing varied, with some reporting relatively stable and what they perceived as sustainable exits to independent living situations. However, at the time of follow up, a far larger number had returned to homelessness following an exit to private rented accommodation, in particular, while others felt that they were at risk of becoming insecurely housed. This section examines the experiences, events and circumstances that impacted young people's sense of housing security. Security of tenure was an issue that arose repeatedly in the Phase 2 interviews and there was also evidence of difficulty—at least among some young people—in adjusting to being re-housed. Finally, a number of personal

circumstances and experiences, including inadequate social and financial resources, substance use and/or relapse, experiences of domestic violence or criminal justice contact, created vulnerability in young people and often posed a threat to their housing security.

Security of Tenure and Tenancy Relationships

Young people who had exited homelessness to private rented accommodation reported varying levels of security in their tenancies. Positive experiences in housing were particularly evident in the accounts of those who were living in accommodation where they felt confident about the status of their tenure. Chloe and Paul, for example, who were both living in private rented accommodation for over one year when we met with them at Phase 2, felt secure and "safe" in their current living arrangements.

> *"I wouldn't be worried about losing the place, no. I don't think he* [landlord] *would kick me out, unless I absolutely did something terrible like. But no I'd be fairly certain that I'm safe enough in that house."* (Chloe, 24, Phase 2)

> *"I'm safe here* [referring to private rented accommodation]*; I don't have to go anywhere . . . there's no rush."* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

Significantly, those young people who felt that their housing was secure (and were not worried about losing their accommodation in the short-term), typically stated that they had signed a fixed-term lease and also built rapport with their landlords over time: *"The landlord's a lovely woman, we all get along well . . . she has a lot of respect for me for the pure fact that I always managed to maintain the rent"* (Paul, 23, Phase 2). These young people often spoke spontaneously about reciprocal tenant-landlord relationships, as well as good communication and exchanges, when discussing the perceived security of their housing.

> *"My landlord is really sound, which makes a big difference. I mean I probably could get away with like not paying my rent for months before he'd throw me out."* (Chloe, 24, Phase 2)

> *"The landlord is grand, I'm not going to be put out on the street at any time, do you know what I mean. When you ring him and you need this done and that done he would come down and do it for you not a bother. He is very fond of me like . . . If you are stuck that week* [for rent] [he] *will give you a hand."* (Collette, 22, Phase 2)

Conversely, those who reported that they lacked security of tenure often described high levels of residential uncertainty as well as high levels of anxiety about the future of their housing.

"[It's] *stable for the moment, but it could change like that.*" (Patrick, 23, Phase 2)

"*Things could change tomorrow—the landlord could say he can't give us the room anymore and then I could end up back in hostels.*" (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)

These young people typically reported that, in the absence of appropriate and affordable housing, the need for immediate and cheap rental accommodation had forced them to enter into situations where they were house sharing on an informal basis and/or had not signed a fixed-term lease with a landlord. Many were acutely aware of the fragility of their housing status and the absence of 'control' over their living situations was a theme that strongly permeated the accounts of these young people and their family members: "*Her* [Abigail's] *house could get taken away from her. That'll bring her down completely*" (Aisling, Abigail's sister, Phase 2). By Phase 2, Bryan, who was renting a property without a formal lease, explained that his autonomy was significantly undermined because he had no security of tenure.

"*You're not in control of your housing, you're not in control of your own interests, your own incentive. I don't know, it's just a feeling that you get like you're not in control of your own lease. You're not in control of your stay or how angry they* [referring to landlord] *could get . . . I could lose the place. We don't have tenants' rights.*" (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)

Reports of difficulties with landlords or estate agents were commonplace and were often exacerbated by experiences of discrimination. Ashley described a difficult relationship with an estate agent and felt 'judged' because of her past experiences of homelessness.

"*It was stigma, it was just a very judgmental environment, it's gotten worse over time . . . it just seemed to me, because we'd been homeless before and she knew that, she seen us as like horrible people, or you must have a drink or drugs problem. It was like, 'They don't deserve to be helped.'*" (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

Ashley was nine months pregnant by Phase 2 of the study. She had been living in private rented accommodation for just under one year but had recently been issued with 28 days' notice to leave the rental property: "*She* [estate agent] *gave me a notice for apparently subletting for money, like it was an illegal notice, it was something I had not done. I didn't understand it at all*" (Ashley, 21, Phase 2). Accounts such as this one demonstrate the precariousness of the living situations of at least some young people subsequent to exiting homelessness services.

Challenging Transitions: The Move to Independent Living

Young people reported varying levels of preparedness at the point of leaving homelessness services and moving to independent living situations. A small number of the young men and women—particularly older participants and those who had prior experience of living independently, often in the private rented sector—reported that they were relatively confident in their ability to move to housing: *"When I got* [the] *house it wasn't as if I was walking in blindfolded. Like I had lived on my own before, so I kind of knew stuff and how to sort this out and that out like to keep the home going basically"* (Collette, 22, Phase 2). In the following account Paul explained that he felt he had the life skills necessary to "look after" himself and adequately maintain a household.

> *"I'm blessed that I'm that type of person, that I'm well able to look after myself. I can cook, I can clean, I can do everything for myself. Because it's nice to be able to do it, you're not relying on anybody else, you know what I mean?"* (Paul, 23, Phase 2)

For others, however, the transition to an autonomous living situation following their departure from homelessness service provision was exceptionally challenging. These young people expressed anxiety about the transition to independent living situations and worried about their ability to cope in accommodation in the absence of support. Ashley explained that she had received follow-on support and assistance after she moved into private rented accommodation for the first time: *"They* [staff on housing support team] *ring you to have a chat every two weeks, just to make sure you're doing ok . . . making sure that we didn't have any issues with anything like the rent allowance or anything to help us with"* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2). However, she nonetheless experienced significant difficulties, particularly during the initial stages of adjusting to independent living.

> *"It was strange, I wasn't used to adjusting to living from—because we were so used to* [STA]*, living with people, staff there, it was just, it was strange to just be living, fending for yourself . . . when you live with staff, it was a lot different because at night-time especially, if you felt lonely or if you felt like you had a problem or something, you could just go downstairs."* (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

Like Ashley, several young people reported feelings of isolation and became somewhat anxious and detached during the period subsequent to securing private rented accommodation: *"Very nervous. I was terrified. I was just, I would have panic attacks—I couldn't sleep at night"* (Sarah, 25, Phase 2). These periods were often coloured by loneliness, bouts of depression, experiences of relapse and a lack or absence of support—from

either formal or informal sources—which further impacted their ability to sustain independent housing.

> *"When you go in* [to private rented housing] *and kind of isolate yourself, it does get very lonely. Like they were saying to me there would be people linking in with me but that just gradually went."* (Warren, 26, Phase 2)

Several family members also articulated a perceived need for young people to receive preparation ahead of the move to independent housing, particularly in relation to budgeting and money management, loneliness and mental health issues: *"I would be a bit nervous for Maria and for* [Maria's daughter] *that she would be too isolated and too much on her own, you know?"* (Geraldine, Maria's mother, Phase 2).

A number of young people who had moved to private rented housing explained that they had subsequently returned to homelessness because they were unable to cope in independent accommodation: *"Going from there to back here* [homelessness]*, it breaks your soul, your confidence, breaks your heart. You know, to go from that to nothing"* (Maria, 26, Phase 2). Simon had been assisted by staff in an STA to move to private rented housing on two separate occasions but was unable to maintain these living situations, partly because the accommodation was sub-standard but also because he did not receive adequate in-housing support.

> *"*[PRS #1] *was a doghouse basically . . . my key worker linked in with me for like two, three weeks, and then after that all downhill since. They told me they were going to get me a SLI* [Support to Live Independently] *worker but they never did . . . then* [PRS #2] *fell to bits and the landlord came in and boarded it up so then my* [partner's aunt] *took me in."* (Simon, 21, Phase 2)

Several young people and their family members felt that young people would benefit from a sustained period of preparation in supported accommodation followed by targeted aftercare or floating support, both during and subsequent to the move to independent housing, as illustrated in Warren's and Teresa's accounts.

> *"I would have liked more support, especially moving back into your own place like to give you more support. Like a bit of aftercare or something like instead of just putting someone into a flat, you know, 'There you go there's your own flat'. Like I'd like to move into* [transitional housing service] *before I move into my own place* [again] *just to get that support before I moved in."* (Warren, 26, phase 2)

> *"I think what Paul, I suppose, would have loved or craved at the time was a bit of security, you know, because from the time you go in somewhere* [STA] *and it's like you know, it's only six months. That six months goes in so fast, you know. There's*

always the worry of like, 'Where am I going to be after the six months?' I think they need to have somewhere more permanent, be it a couple of years, just for them to mature, because a lot of them are young, they're very young and, you know, they've a lot of growing up to do and that." (Teresa, Paul's mother, Phase 2)

Others told that, despite being housed, the search for suitable housing was ongoing due to the poor physical condition of their current accommodation: *"I do feel like I always kinda want to find somewhere better"* (Chloe, 24, Phase 2). In her follow-up interview, Chloe repeatedly identified barriers to housing stability including: rising rents, difficult relationships with landlords, financial concerns and a lack of support services aimed at assisting young people who are already housed, as opposed to services targeting young people currently experiencing homelessness.

"I mean I have a child, I've been homeless . . . I think they [services] *need to like look at like the criteria* [because] *I think they do it wrong . . . Like they're trying to house people, they're not actually trying to help people keep them or like give people like a perfect home. They think if you're in a house you're fine. They're just like, 'Oh here you go. You have a house now, happy?' So like yeah, I suppose I'd do it myself so I can get what I want. Rather than what I need."* (Chloe, 24, Phase 2)

Chloe's account, like several others, highlights the difficulties and insecurities that many young people confront as they attempt to negotiate the move to independent accommodation. Perhaps significantly, stable housing was not a uniformly positive experience, nor was the search for appropriate accommodation necessarily over once housing was initially secured. Furthermore, typical accounts of the transition out of homelessness point strongly to a need for ongoing support for young people in housing to help them to maintain these exits, source alternative/appropriate accommodation (where relevant) and mitigate the risk of failed tenancies and/or returns to situations of housing instability.

Ongoing Threats to Housing Security

"Once you've been there [homeless] *it's a constant feeling of uneasiness; you're never quite secure."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

As the previous sections demonstrate, the events and circumstances that shaped the young people's exits from homelessness and experiences in housing were multifaceted and overlapping. Many of the challenges that young people faced were related to the lack of appropriate and affordable 'move on' options and, even with the support of professionals within homelessness services, most struggled to source suitable accommodation.

For those who did move (either temporarily or for longer periods) to private rented accommodation, in particular, living conditions were often inadequate and, in any case, a large number found the transition to independent living markedly challenging. There were other experiences that presented difficulties and/or posed a threat to young people's ability to sustain housing and, among these, financial problems and insecurities featured centrally. Raphael had been living in an STA for more than one year when we first met him and, by the time of Phase 2, had lived in a number of private rented accommodations. All of these living situations had broken down because of his inability to maintain rental payments: *"I ended up finding accommodation on my own to move in and it didn't work and after that they* [landlord] *kicked me out after one month for not paying rent . . . I ended up using the* [Central Placement Service]*"* (Raphael, 24, Phase 2). Like a majority of the study's young people, he was reliant on social welfare payments and constantly struggled to make ends meet.

> *"I am on a* [social welfare] *payment at the moment but the payments come in every week but I end up having no money after two days because I have to pay bills, you know, and I have to pay rent."* (Raphael, 24, Phase 2)

Four young people—all young women—stated that issues related to experiences of domestic violence and/or sexual assault had resulted in either the loss of housing or posed a significant threat to the stability and sustainability of their current accommodation. Following her baseline interview, Phoebe quickly disengaged from services, entered into private rented living arrangements with a romantic partner and soon became pregnant. However, the relationship became violent and she experienced sustained mental and physical abuse from her partner over a nine-month period.

> *"He* [partner] *started getting, well, controlling and threatening to tie me up and all . . . He ended up hitting me a box into the mouth and given me three or four head butts, you know, loafs, full force and he knocked out my teeth."* (Phoebe, 24, Phase 2)

With the assistance of the police, Phoebe abandoned this apartment and returned to the home of her mother, where she had been residing in overcrowded conditions for many months by the time of her follow-up interview: *"I packed a case, I left the best part of my stuff down there, I just packed two cases and left the next day. Back to my mam's"* (Phoebe, 24, Phase 2). Similarly, Jacqui (Rebecca's mother) and Samantha (Aoife's sister) told that Rebecca and Aoife had recently lost private rented accommodation

(three in the case of Rebecca and one in the case of Aoife) due to ongoing issues related to domestic violence.

> *"She* [Rebecca] *was doing very well. She had a beautiful house, lovely three-bedroom a big house . . . and she lost that house over him* [partner]*."* (Jacqui, Rebecca's mother, Phase 2)

> *"She* [Aoife] *got back with that fella she was going out with. She moved in with him, but that didn't really last . . . he was, he's violent, you know what I mean, so she got away, well she's away from him now. So she came out here for a couple of days because she was waiting to get into a refuge, a women's refuge."* (Samantha, Aoife's sister, Phase 2)

Rebecca was living in her fourth accommodation in the private rented sector at the time of follow up and her mother expressed strong concerns that this housing would again break down and lead her back to homelessness.

> *"I'd really worry about that because I think she'll go back on drugs* [due to her partner's drug use and the experience of domestic violence]*, she'll go back big time on drugs and I'm afraid of my life she'll end up on the streets."* (Jacqui, Rebecca's mother, Phase 2)

The far reaching and lasting negative effects of experiences of violence were prominent in the narratives of those young women who had experienced intimate partner abuse. Sarah, who had been sexually assaulted a number of years previously, described the distressing impact of that experience, which had been exacerbated by a protracted court case: *"Like I couldn't be stable or, you know. I think because it's going on so long now I think it's actually stopping me from moving on properly with my life"* (Sarah, 25, Phase 2).

Other young people, particularly males, reported that they had accrued (sometimes multiple) criminal charges and were concerned about the outcome of their court cases. For a number, the threat of incarceration, which would result in the loss of housing, loomed large: *"Next year is going to be a bad year for me with the case going on, there could be any outcome. And the worst outcome you know . . ."* (Bryan, 23, Phase 2). Patrick also expressed concern about his involvement in criminal activity and the implications for his future.

> *"Like I'm just worried that I'll keep, that I'll keep getting in trouble. Like, and keep getting charges and all that stuff. I don't want that. I want to make it stop, ya know that kinda way? Like even the last few days I'm thinking, 'Where's me life going?'"* (Patrick, 23, Phase 2)

Drug- or alcohol-related relapse was a significant concern articulated by young people who had histories of problematic substance use. For example, although Sarah and Maria had significantly reduced their substance use, both struggled to cope with negative life experiences and long-standing mental health problems, including suicidal ideation, depression and self-harm.

> *"This is my first time having to deal with anything being sober and clean off drugs and everything so now it's like, I don't know, it's like it just, it hurts more."* (Sarah, 25, Phase 2)

> *"I find it much harder to function now that I'm clean. Because I was on methadone for ten years, you know, and now having to think of things and figure things out."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

In the following excerpt, Sarah described the perceived tenuousness of her sobriety and her fear of 'slipping back' into previous patterns of behaviour which, in turn, would almost certainly jeopardise her housing stability.

> *"It's so easy to end up back there* [referring to drug use]*, that's the hard thing. It could happen like because I have been on the verge and just chose not to but I could easily have just went and got stoned. I think it's just trying to be strong and trying to have the willpower not to do it because I know one slip for me would mean back at square one."* (Sarah, 25, Phase 2)

Several of the participating family members expressed similar concerns. Teresa, for example, highlighted her son's need for ongoing support in relation to his drinking while living in independent housing: *"He still drinks, you know, it's probably the only thing I wouldn't be happy about. It's a slippery slope and that's where he had a lot of problems"* (Teresa, Paul's mother, Phase 2).

Substance use problems and experiences of relapse also directly impacted some young people's ability to sustain an exit to independent housing. Michael is an example of one young person who attributed his return to homelessness to a drug-related relapse following a prolonged period of abstinence: *"I had a decent job, was getting decent money, had the apartment, was happy enough. And then my head went so I just went mad on the coke and the tablets* [un-prescribed medication] *and I just started all over again"* (Michael, 25, Phase 2). For a number, ongoing or resumed substance use created financial strain, hindered young people's coping abilities and also led to strained relationships with family members, friends and landlords.

> ### Case Study: Joe, age 22 years
>
> Joe was living in in a youth-orientated STA for over a year when we met him for the first time. Following his interview at Phase 1, he told that he subsequently left his accommodation due to ongoing tension with staff and opted instead to stay in his friend's family home. Following his departure, and in the absence of support, his substance use quickly escalated and his mental health deteriorated rapidly, resulting in his admission to an accident and emergency department: *"I was very fucking suicidal, I was down in myself"*. From there he was admitted to a psychiatric hospital and, at the point of discharge, returned to a situation of 'hidden' homelessness. In the following account he explained that he felt he was *"going around in circles"* during that period.
>
> Joe subsequently entered a residential treatment programme before being placed in step-down housing (which he soon lost because he was not able to maintain rental payments), after which he moved to another STA: *"I was fucking freaking out, I was panicking, and at this stage I kind of started drinking again"*. He then lived in a situation of 'hidden' homelessness for a prolonged period before sourcing private rented accommodation where he had been living for just under a year at the time of his Phase 2 interview. He explained that, although he was holding down a job and felt secure in his accommodation, he was nonetheless worried that things could 'slip' due to his ongoing alcohol consumption. Once again, he felt like he was "going round in circles".
>
> *"It's one thing getting clean, it's fucking very hard staying clean. I know how easy it is to slip back into it all, that's the thing. I still am drinking, I think sometimes I feel like, 'Ah, when's it going to stop', like that, I'm fucking going round in circles."*

To a large extent, the accounts presented here demonstrate the complex needs of young people, both during and subsequent to (sometimes prolonged) periods of homelessness. They also highlight the importance of speedy exits or transitions from emergency or short-term homelessness services, alongside ongoing support in housing, particularly for those with histories of substance use, mental health problems and also for young people who have experienced violence and victimisation.

Conclusion

With an emphasis on process—and paying particular attention to significant events and experiences in the young people's lives over the course of the study—this chapter has examined the array of experiences that interacted to produce trajectories that facilitated or, alternatively, hindered a route to stable housing. In keeping with the findings of previous research conducted in Ireland and elsewhere (Braciszewski *et al.*, 2016; Mallet *et al.*, 2010; Milburn *et al.*, 2009; Mayock *et al.*, 2008, 2011b, 2013), family support emerged as an important enabler for some young people. Such support did not mean a permanent return home in most cases, a move that was, in fact, not viewed as feasible by a majority; rather, family reconciliation and improved family relationships provided young people with a sense of security and, for many, an important 'safety net', especially during periods of particular need.

For those young people who had positive relationships with professionals (including key workers and aftercare workers), the support they received from service staff provided a crucial enabler to them sourcing and maintaining housing. However, as the findings demonstrate, many young people felt that they did not have adequate support in housing, which led to feelings of social isolation and sometimes contributed to a breakdown of housing and a return to homelessness. Finally, the young people's accounts reveal numerous threats to housing security. These include financial problems, which negatively impacted young people's ability to maintain rental payments but also extented to personal challenges, including experiences of domestic violence, criminal justice contact and ongoing problems associated with alcohol and/or drug use. These and other threats to housing stability are explored and elaborated further in the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Homeless Young People And Housing: Constraints And Barriers Of Access

This chapter continues the 'story' of young people's experiences of seeking residential stability, focusing first on structural barriers to housing. As the analysis demonstrates, conditions within the housing market—in particular, the lack of affordable housing—significantly constrained young people's ability to carve a route out of homelessness. Attention then turns to young people's interactions with and perspectives on the services they accessed, sometimes over prolonged periods of time, which frequently resulted in a sense of disempowerment and fatigue with the service system. The chapter concludes by documenting one significant consequence of young people remaining in homelessness services for prolonged periods, which led many to opt to live 'off grid' and in situations where they were no longer visible to the homeless service sector and did not have access to formal support.

Barriers of Access to Affordable Housing

> *"I have my job, I have my course, I'm getting detoxed . . . It's my home that I really need, all I'm waiting for is a place."* (Alison, 21, Phase 2)

The lack of affordable and appropriate housing options was repeatedly highlighted by the study's young people as a barrier to exiting homelessness: *"All through this time, I've been actively looking for a place to live. And* [there's] *nowhere in my price range, that is just a fact, nowhere at all"* (Maria, 26, Phase 2). While many young people had experience of seeking accommodation in the private rental sector and were focussed strongly on achieving housing stability, almost all of their accounts highlighted *multiple* economic and systematic constraints of access to independent accommodation. Problems associated with an unaffordable and highly competitive rental market were compounded by the poor standard of affordable rental properties, restrictive or inadequate rent supplement payments and discrimination on the part of landlords against those in receipt of rent subsidy.

> *"Even though I was eligible for the rent supplement initiative it was still impossible to find housing."* (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)

"She's [Aoife] *not going to find somewhere now, there's nowhere for her to live anyway. Like there's nothing, especially not on rent allowance.*" (Samantha, Aoife's sister, Phase 2)

As the following accounts demonstrate, these experiences served to exacerbate the situations of low-income, welfare-dependent homeless young people, who were already vulnerable to housing stress.

"*Most people don't want to take rent allowance. You'd get there* [rental property] *and you'd be like, 'OK I'll take this', and they'd* [landlord] *be like, 'OK grand'. And then we'd say, 'Yep we're paying by rent allowance' and they'd be like, 'Oh no sorry we don't accept rent allowance.'*" (Abigail, 21, Phase 2)

"*I'm looking for a place now and just nowhere—everywhere is taking cash at the moment. They want to be paid cash and there's people going there who are willing to pay cash. Every time I go there's like fifty people waiting at them* [property viewing]. *At the moment* [it's] *very hard, really hard.*" (Warren, 26, Phase 2)

"*It's like because I'm only entitled to the rent* [in line with current rent supplement caps] *so I'm limited to what I can look for.*" (Sarah, 25, Phase 2)

Other structural constraints of access to housing included protracted waiting periods for social housing and problems or delays in accessing rent allowance or other social welfare supports: "*I had the rent and a lease agreement with the landlord, you know, but the rent allowance was not organised for me so I was waiting to get rent allowance*" (Raphael, 24, Phase 2). A number of young people were critical of the fact that, as recipients of rent supplement, they had to forego other routes to housing and educational opportunities in order to meet certain eligibility criteria, as Sarah and Ashley explained.

"*It's bitter sweet because if you are getting rent allowance, then you are off the council* [local authority housing list]. *You are not entitled to your council place because you are renting and then you have to start from scratch again.*" (Sarah, 25, Phase 2)

"*I did two years of* [third-level degree]. *And then I had to drop out because if I was in college I couldn't get rent allowance; couldn't get paid. It was hard, obviously. It was just like I was losing the opportunity. But it was something I had to do to move on. It was kind of complicated, the whole situation.*" (Ashley, 21, Phase 2)

Several young people also articulated an awareness that they were perceived negatively by landlords because they were 'young' and unemployed.

"*It's not even just accepting rent allowance, they* [landlords] *look at your age, do you work, you know what I mean?*" (Shane, 19, Phase 2)

"They don't always like the idea of an eighteen-year-old with no history of living on their own. They just look and think, 'No, he's too young.'" (Christopher, 18, Phase 2)

Many others recounted experiences and interactions with prospective landlords where they felt that they were not given the same opportunities as other renters who were older and did not have a history of homelessness and housing instability.

"I've viewed about twenty-eight places. It's very hard even to get a viewing—when you're eighteen, nineteen you are never going to get a place like, not one of them would take me I'm telling you." (Ross, 19, Phase 2)

"Like, say if I went up to view somewhere and like they see where you are coming from and all, like if they see [homeless hostel]*, like, they'd be looking at me and* [partner] *thinking, 'Oh they're going to be having mad parties all the time' and like, things like that where it would be totally wrong."* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)

A lack of affordable accommodation created blockages in the service system and resulted in many young people remaining in homelessness services for significant periods of time, thus increasing their vulnerability to experiences of continued or repeat homelessness: *"It's like he* [Conor] *is in there* [STA] *how long now? Two years. It's getting old, he's sick of it and wants his own place, you know . . . he's well overdue at the moment"* (Kelly, Conor's sister, Phase 2). A considerable number had lived in supported temporary accommodation for well over the official maximum length of stay and invariably expressed anxiety about what was going to happen next, often fearing a return to homelessness emergency provision due to a lack of 'move on' options. Maria, who had spent a lengthy period of time living in an STA prior to moving home, asserted that short- or medium-term accommodation services are essentially "redundant" because there is nowhere for young people to transition to once their time in these service settings expires.

"I feel like short-term accommodation is great for actually moving people on but at the minute it's redundant because no one's getting moved on . . . They are just being used as a six-month hostel to go back to a night hostel, then you're going backwards. So you constantly feel like none of this matters, why follow the rules, why do anything, why be happy, why get clean, why do these things? When you know, they're giving you this opportunity and you're [just going] *back to a night hostel."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

The problems of housing availability and affordability meant that accessing the private rented sector as a first step on the path to housing stability was ultimately out of reach for a majority: *"I know like it will take years to find a place"* (Ross, 19, Phase 2); *"It's hard to think about the future*

right now because it's so uncertain" (Maria, 26, Phase 2). The process of seeking housing was a particular point of vulnerability for young people, who in most cases had few social and economic resources that might bolster their chances of forming independent households. As a consequence, many expressed feelings of uncertainty, concern and despair about their futures and, in particular, about the enduring nature of their homelessness and whether it would ever be resolved.

> *"There is not enough supports, there is not enough housing so like once you fall into this trap it's very, very hard to get out of it, do you know what I mean? I can keep trying, like I'll keep trying, it's just not easy. I could have somewhere sorted out in two days, two weeks, two months, two years."* (Michael, 26, Phase 2)

> *"I just feel like giving up. There is nothing around. I actually haven't* [been looking] *because of what is after being written all over the news and all like* [referring to the media coverage of the housing crisis in Ireland]. *I'm kind of thinking it is not the right time to look. They are saying they are supporting the families which I think is great and I'm delighted but like I am going through homelessness now years like, do you know what I mean? Like I can just see myself now just sitting, talking to you* [referring to interviewer] *for example in another two years' time and just having been somewhere else, and trying to still get a place. It's just not in my head now that I think I am going to get anywhere."* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)

"I Feel like Nobody is Listening": Perceived Lack of Support and Service Fatigue

The challenges experienced by young people as they attempted to navigate the private rental market were diverse. Most, for example, had little or no knowledge or experience of the rental sector and, in particular, of dealing with landlords or letting agents. A number also talked about the challenge of saving money to pay a rental deposit as well as their limited ability to supply references from previous landlords at the point of trying to secure rental accommodation. Many also appeared not to be adequately informed and/or aware of the services available to them, which posed significant challenges as they attempted to navigate and potentially exit the service system. The absence of a perceived 'plan' and process of securing housing left some feeling "in the dark".

> *"To be honest, they* [homelessness organisation] *didn't give us enough* [help] . . . *like with where to go, or what to do or, yeah, like I wanted things to speed up, you know what I'm saying like? But I didn't feel like I was getting a plan or it was even pointless seeing them, to be honest. I didn't know nothing. I was left in the dark."* (Sophie, 22, phase 2)

Inadequate Support Structures

A number of young people appeared to be largely uninformed about, or did not meet, the eligibility criteria for certain entitlements, plans or packages, particularly those related to aftercare provision. Alan and Ross had both been placed in a residential care setting during their late teens but, having lived in care for less than one year, did not qualify for the same level of after-care support as their peers who had longer care histories. As the following excerpts demonstrate, a lack of clarity and understanding led to considerable confusion and frustration about their situations; both experienced signifi-cant barriers to housing stability on reaching the age of 18 years.

> *"There was no options for me when I got fucked out of there* [residential aftercare service]. *Then someone else got one of those bedsits. I got nothing, I got fucked straight into a hostel and that's all they done for me saying that my circumstances were different. I dunno what they were talking about, 'Your aftercare plan was different' and all but I never seen that aftercare plan, I'm meant to have seen it. Never even knew I had it . . . I wasn't equal to everyone else like I just felt like no one was doing anything for me."* (Alan, 19, Phase 2)

> *"I was a month short or something* [to receive an aftercare package] *. . . They were saying, 'I'm going to move you on to accommodation' like and then it never happened . . . When I turned eighteen, two weeks after I was kicked out* [of under 18s 'out of home' provision]. *I would have liked aftercare. I have a mate, he is only like two days older, and he got a place, the minute he turned eighteen, he got an apartment. After I left* [under 18s 'out of home' provision] *I started going into hostels. Then I started just smoking weed heavy, then taking tablets when I came here* [STA].*"* (Ross, 19, Phase 2)

Several told that they had 'nowhere to go' at the point of discharge from care or from under-18s service settings and had moved directly from supported living environments to adult homelessness accommodation with low or no aftercare or follow-on assistance. Entry to adult systems of intervention was depicted as difficult and young people invariably struggled to cope following the sudden withdrawal of youth-specific sup-port. The sudden depletion of material, financial and emotional resources was typically exacerbated by a general lack of preparedness for daily life, which further hampered young people's efforts to negotiate a route out of homelessness. Maria, who had entered care when she was 13 years old, and Jess, the sister of one of the participating young women, talked about the challenges and difficulties that can arise—particularly in terms of knowing 'where to go' and 'what to do'—at the point when young people transition to adult services.

"When I turned eighteen, the follow-on help from the under eighteens to over eighteens was dismal, 'We've done all this for you for the last few years, you're now eighteen, figure it out yourself. I'm not even going to tell you where to go and get your payment, where to go and do this or what hostels you can go to'. None of these things are explained to you then." (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

"She [Abigail] *had one* [aftercare worker]*, but you only get one up 'til you're twenty-one. I don't think it's right though, you're like, 'Right I have to do everything on me own', like, 'What will I do or how will I do it?' See she has no one to help her along the year, do you know. So it's all of the work to do on her own now . . . it'll be real difficult for her* [to find housing]*. Like I can help as much as I can, but I couldn't help that much to be honest."* (Jess, Abigail's sister, Phase 2)

Over time, some of these young people became further entrenched in a pattern of residential instability, an experience that not only exacerbated the precariousness of their situations by prolonging their homelessness, but also led to a deterioration in their mental health and/or increased alcohol and/or drug consumption, in many cases. For others, particularly young men, lengthy periods of homelessness and housing instability had propelled a number along a path of criminal justice contact. Ross (quoted earlier) had been living in under-18's 'out of home' provision when we met him for the first time. During his follow-up interview, he told that he had 'aged out' of his accommodation and had since been alternating between numerous adult homelessness services, including TEAs and STAs. He reported that his substance use and involvement in criminal activities had increased during this time and that his health and mental health had also declined.

"When I had to go homeless that's the worst thing. They [under 18s 'out of home' provision] *were throwing me into the hostel, the homeless system . . . Every single hostel, loads of them, 'You are on a waiting list, you are on a waiting list, you are on a waiting list', this is all you get. Then I started going off my head. I ended up in a psychiatric unit for a few weeks. That was over all the homeless shit and all, like I just went mad being angry and all."* (Ross, 19, Phase 2)

Overall, there was considerable evidence to suggest that targeted after-care or follow-on support was not reaching all young people and/or was not experienced uniformly.

"It's like every service, once you're gone it's like, 'You're no longer our problem.'" (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

"They looked after you and made sure you didn't die but the minute you turn eighteen, just kick you [out] *and having to sleep rough and all."* (Ross, 19, Phase 2)

The sudden withdrawal of support at the point of reaching official 'adulthood' had particular implications for those young people who had high support needs related to, for example, mental health and/or substance use, and several expressed strong concerns about moving to independent living situations in the absence of support to help them to address and manage these challenges and difficulties: *"I'm still grieving* [the death of a family member]. *So I'm not going to lie to you, I'm still lashing the drink out of it and it is a problem and taking tablets and what not, just to blank the memories"* (Eoghan, 19, Phase 2). The narratives of these young people often focused on their need for accommodation where they could continue to work on these issues prior to moving to independent or unsupported living situations if they were to have any success in sustaining housing in the future.

> *"I'm not at that phase yet where they think that I'd be capable on me own, you know? But I'm getting there. Just the fact that like I wouldn't trust meself living on me own because I know I'd end up getting in debt or something like that or if I was depressed or anything like that because I suffer with post-traumatic stress, you know. I want the support right now."* (Gary, 20, Phase 2)

> *"I think I need to just have an agenda for the year. I think I just need to get my head in the right place. When my head is together all I'm going to be doing is looking for places, you know what I mean?"* (Ross, 18, Phase 2)

Family members were also eager to highlight the need for targeted, ongoing supports if young people were to successfully manage their lives and their housing. Jacqui, for example, expressed serious concern about her daughter's multiple needs in relation to substance use, mental health, domestic violence and parenting if she was to achieve stability in the longer-term.

> *"Nobody is helping her. I think Rebecca needs to be put into a drink and drugs facility. She needs to be talked to about relationships, parenting, she needs all that stuff like. There is a lot of stuff going on in her head and sometimes she would say to me, 'Oh my God, to be honest I could stand on a bridge and jump in'. I think she could be capable of doing something bad to herself like, you know."* (Jacqui, Rebecca's mother, Phase 2)

Service Fatigue

Perhaps significantly, young people frequently highlighted what they perceived as unequal power dynamics in their interactions with staff members in some service settings. Experiences such as these tended to be more appar-

ent in young people's account of their interactions with emergency accommodation services and adult systems of intervention and frequently led to them feeling sidelined, marginalised and ignored. While young people's basic living requirements were met in these service settings (that is, they had access to shelter, food and washing facilities), many reported that their preferences and personal sense of what they needed was overlooked or ignored by service providers. This was particularly evident in the accounts of those young people who had alcohol and/or drug use problems.

> *"The council want to put me back to where there is drink and drugs surrounding me and when I tell them, 'You can't put me in these environments, I used to have issues here, I can't be around that',* [they just say] *'Well that's all we have'"* (Michael, 25, Phase 2).

In the following excerpt Joe explained that his requests for help in accessing alcohol treatment services while living in an STA were consistently disregarded despite his repeated attempts to raise the issue with his key worker.

> *"We sat down with them* [key workers] *but they kind of—they were always right. I mentioned to my key worker at the time, I had various key workers—I said to her a number of times that I wanted to go into treatment. She was like, 'Oh you're not even that bad'. She said that to me, I don't know how many times. But* [she] *didn't know the ins and outs, she didn't know what I was going through on a daily basis."* (Joe, 22, Phase 2)

Like others who reported experiences of not being 'listened to' in service settings, Joe made the decision to disengage from the homeless service sector, opting instead to enter a prolonged situation of 'hidden' homelessness where he had no access to support. With the passing of time, he became entrenched in a pattern of heavy substance use.

> *"I didn't feel like they* [staff] *were helping me. So I kind of got angry and one of me friends offered to let me stay with him for a while, so I said, 'Fuck it, that's a roof over me head, it's not a hostel'. But the two of us were dragging each other down big time. Because I was drinking, taking a lot of tablets and a lot of cocaine"* (Joe, 22, Phase 2).

Difficulties associated with establishing positive and supportive relationships or connections with service staff were repeatedly emphasised by young people and these challenges were frequently aggravated by the high levels of mobility that many experienced as they moved between various service settings: *"It's a big difference, trying to talk to somebody new* [referring to staff in services]. *It's very hard to open up and try and explain to them what*

your story is, you don't have the same bond as you did with the other person" (Peter, 24, Phase 2). A number of young people also commented on the perceived 'facelessness' of their interactions with service providers, which left them feeling dehumanised by the service system: *"Neglected, I felt all that, I felt like I was only a number"* (Sophie, 22, Phase 2). Experiences of this kind appeared to act as a barrier to young people's engagement with service professionals, in some cases, and did little to empower them to negotiate a route to stable housing. Some young people articulated an awareness of the nature of the information shared between services about them, which they perceived as presenting a one-sided and negative picture of their life experiences.

> *"[Services are just] sent a piece of paper that says, 'Maria. Twenty-six. Ex-addict. Baby'. That's all they get, that is all the information they get. It's so faceless, you know, it's all paperwork. It doesn't say that I went into* [treatment setting] *and got clean and now I have a beautiful baby. That stuff never goes into it. And that's sad because you're being judged at your worst moments, always. It's not even five per cent of your personality but it is a hundred per cent of how you're perceived by this system."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

Maria, like others, was also critical of the perceived 'disconnect', fragmentation and lack of inter-agency coordination between (and within) the homelessness sector and other service systems (housing, mental health, drug/alcohol treatment, and so on).

> *"Like there needs to be more transparency* [between services]*, because there's so many now . . . There's so many people but nobody knows what the other is doing. It's ridiculous . . . Nobody can give you an answer, it is so frustrating."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

> *"I think the services are very fragmented, you know. There's a bit here, a bit there, and you could be six months there and then you're here and, you know, it's all over the place."* (Teresa, Paul's mother, Phase 2)

A smaller number of young people were eager to highlight the need for more flexibility, as well as improved structures within services, particularly in relation to a better understanding on the part of service staff and other personnel of the 'lived experience' of homelessness and young people's particular needs.

> *"Like that's the thing, because another key worker who has been working in the services for a few years knows what's going on, will bend those rules and find a way to make it work. That's why they* [staff] *need the experience . . . It's like all the stars have to align, you've got to get that worker who's been in that service for a few years*

who knows someone who works in [housing service]*, who knows somebody else that works in* [resettlement service]*, you've got to have all these. Because otherwise, you're ringing them, 'We'll ring you back, we'll ring you back'.* [Some key workers are] *more knowledgeable and more experienced than someone straight out of college who* [just] *knows everything in the books."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

Very frequently, negative experiences—often compounded by high levels of instability within service settings—cultivated a sense of disempowerment in young people, who felt that they had no control or 'say' in their everyday lives. As a consequence, many became increasingly disillusioned with—and also distanced from—systems of intervention over time. Indeed, many expressed a lack of trust in service providers during their follow-up interviews: *"None of them kept in touch with me like so there's no point in me going back to them"* (Alan, 19, Phase 2). Like Phoebe, who had returned home and was living with her mother by the time of Phase 2, a number told that they had largely lost faith in the ability of support services to resolve their homelessness.

"I wouldn't go [to services] *because they never helped before. So I don't know why they would now."* (Phoebe, 25, Phase 2)

In this sense, a lack of support and engagement with services providers, coupled with a lack of consistency and stability within service environments, frequently undermined young people's ability to navigate the service system and find a route out of homelessness. Those who reported deficiencies in the level of formal assistance available to them almost always reported more chaotic homelessness trajectories, multiple transitions between living situations and a continued reliance on various forms of unstable accommodation types. These young people also typically expressed a sense of hopelessness about their situations; they believed they were 'falling through the gaps' and had ultimately become 'lost' in the homeless service system.

"I was more angry that nobody wanted to help me. Psychiatric ward couldn't help me; everywhere was just like, 'No. No'. [Homelessness organisation] *couldn't help me. Everywhere was just palming me onto the next person, the next person, to the next person. And that's why I just went hell for leather on the drugs then."* (Joe, 22, Phase 2)

Living 'Off Grid': Young People Seeking Alternative Routes toHousing

In the absence of appropriate or affordable housing options, a considerable number of the study's young people appeared to seek out alternative routes to what they considered to be more stable forms of accommodation. These young people's strong desire to achieve some level of residential stability away from emergency homelessness services led them to enter into unfavourable living arrangements, often out of desperation and at a point when all other attempts to access the housing market had been unsuccessful.

> *"Beggars can't be choosers, like that's literally how I feel. I'm just going to literally have to take wherever I can get."* (Maria, 26, Phase 2)

> *"*[Doubling up] *is fine if you're on the edge of homelessness or still at risk of being homeless. I took it* [referring to accommodation] *because it was an opportunity and I seized the opportunity of course, like anyone else would."* (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)

Like Maria and Bryan, others felt that they had no option but to enter into independent living situations at the lowest end of the quality spectrum: *"There was rot on the wall like, and it was really, really bad. But I was at the stage I was like, 'OK I don't care. I'm going to take it'"* (Abigail, 21, Phase 2). A considerable number of young people recounted prolonged periods—and multiple episodes, in many cases—of 'hidden' homelessness; that is, periods spent sleeping rough, 'doubling up' in accommodation in overcrowded conditions and/or embarking on a period of 'sofa surfing' when they moved between the homes of friends, acquaintances, relatives, and, in several cases, the homes of their partner's family member(s): *"I'm just between houses at the moment, I move around"* (Abigail, 21, Phase 2); *"Like I've moved a few times, I'm living up in me mate's* [family home] *right now, I'll stay on the couch like."* (Alan, 19, Phase 2).

Shane told that he had recently left residential aftercare following ongoing tension with staff members and difficulties adapting to the service structure. With no 'move on' accommodation in place at the time of his departure, he moved into the family home of his girlfriend who was pregnant with their second child. In the following account, he depicted a living situation characterised by extreme overcrowding.

> *"There is seven of us in a three-bedroom house. It's crowded, do you know what I mean, her ma* [referring to his partner's mother] *is asleep on the sofa every night. Her young fellow has to take her room. The two girls* [referring to his partner's sisters] *are in one room. Me, the baby and my* [partner] *are in the one room . . . There isn't room for everybody."* (Shane, 19, Phase 2)

While these living situations provided a temporary solution to young people's basic need for shelter, they were highly insecure, unpredictable and untenable in the longer-term. In some cases, they merely provided a stopgap for those who sought to avoid homelessness services: *"What's the point in me going into a hostel and just getting stuck there and having to leave every morning at nine o'clock. I'm just staying in my mate's until I get somewhere"* (Alan, 19, Phase 2).

In other instances, young people had entered into informal rental agreements with landlords or home owners and had abruptly lost these accommodations: *"Rent prices so high, there are so many people that are in really bad situations. And they're like forcing people into bad situations with what they're doing"* (Chloe, 24, Phase 2). Many of these young people subsequently re-entered homelessness. Warren is one of a number who had been forced to leave private rented accommodation, often with only short or practically no notice from a landlord. He had been evicted from his first private rented accommodation due to anti-social behaviour on the part of his neighbours and had sourced alternative housing following a 'tip' from a friend who was living in the building: *"I moved over there, no lease or anything. My friend was there the last* [number of] *years without a lease so it didn't really faze me"* (Warren, 26, Phase 2). However, he suddenly lost that accommodation and, with no alternative housing in place at the time of his departure, was forced back into emergency homelessness services.

> *"Was only there about five to six months* [and] *the landlord came and told all the tenants in the house he was selling up* [because] *he was getting too old. Now the house is sold and all so he's after leaving a lot of people homeless . . . I went into the hostels* [then]*, I did."* (Warren, 26, Phase 2)

Like others, Warren experienced significant disruption during this period of residential uncertainty and expressed strong feelings of anger and distress about his situation: *"I felt really angry. I felt really pissed off to be honest. Like the thoughts that go through your head are horrible like especially when you have to walk around the streets and all. That was very depressing"* (Warren, 26, Phase 2).

A smaller number of people had returned to live with a parent, usually their mother, in order to escape the perceived transience of hostel life. It is important to note that not all returns home were depicted as 'stable' since, for some, the transition was considered to be undesirable; indeed, some young people framed it as a last resort.

Q. Did you feel moving home was the best place for you then at that time?

A. *"No, it wasn't, but I knew it was the only place that I could go, so let's just make do with what I had like."* (Patrick, 23, Phase 2)

In other instances, returns home subsequently broke down and resulted in further residential and personal upheavals. This was often the case for young people whose family histories were characterised by high levels of familial conflict, including experiences of domestic violence, parental substance use or mental health issues and/or childhood neglect. These young people often chose to remove themselves from what they considered to be damaging home-based situations in order to make healthier decisions in their lives. Abigail told that she had been asked to leave step-down aftercare accommodation because, having entered into full-time employment (and not an educational programme), she no longer met the eligibility criteria for aftercare provision: *"When I couldn't find a place they* [staff] *asked would it be possible for me to move back to me mam's. And I said, 'Listen, I wouldn't be here if I could live with me mam?'"* (Abigail, 21, Phase 2). With no appropriate 'move on' housing in place at the time of her departure, she had no choice but to move back in with her mother who had a long-standing and serious alcohol problem. In the following account she explained why she eventually left her mother's home and embarked on a pattern of movement between situations of 'hidden' homelessness.

"I was staying back in my mam's and it wasn't doing any good for me. It was terrible like. My mam's house is always cold. She doesn't pay for anything, you know. And then if you're left paying for—you've nothing to live off then. I can't stay in me mam's, you can't live there, so I'm in between friends' houses and my boyfriend's [family home]. *"* (Abigail, 21, Phase 2)

In this sense, a return to the family home was not always considered by young people or their family members to be an appropriate, safe or desirable option. This was particularly the case for older study participants, who typically framed these returns home as a temporary solution that was only marginally preferable to homelessness service environments.

Case Study: Maria, age 26 years

Maria initially moved back and forth between an STA and her family home upon discovering that she was pregnant shortly after her baseline interview. She had ceased heroin use during the time that elapsed between Phases 1 and 2 of the study and had been living in her mother's house for just under a year and a half with her young child when we met her for the second time: *"I was supposed to be here for the most, two months. I am now here seventeen months"*. She felt strongly that her current living situation was unfavourable and that she was in fact "becoming less independent" since returning to live with her mother.

> *"I mean, right now, it is tense, it's tense here, it's not good for* [child]*, it's really not good for me. You know, she* [mother] *helps, she really does, but I feel like, it's making me worse because she constantly makes it obvious that it's her house. I feel like I'm regressing completely, I'm becoming less independent . . . I feel like I'm becoming a fifteen-year-old."*

Maria's mother was also critical of the lack of follow-on support that she and Maria received following her transition home: *"It was stated* [by services] *that she* [Maria] *was coming here. From once she came home I thought it was very, very slack in any type of services. There was nobody* [that] *came here"* (Geraldine, Maria's mother, Phase 2).

Like others who reported negative experiences of returning home, Maria considered herself to be 'homeless' and was frustrated by the absence of formal support that could enable her to live independently: *"They'd* [referring to governmental agencies] *be like, 'We will help you when you're homeless'. How am I not homeless if I'm living in someone else's home? I'm a grown adult with a baby, it makes no sense"*. By the time of follow up, Maria felt—perhaps paradoxically—that she had no other option than to re-enter emergency services in order to receive the kind of assistance that would bolster her chances of becoming housed.

> *"It's going to have to come down to me leaving her* [child] *and going back into homelessness. I'll do it tomorrow, I'll go homeless for the few weeks if that's what I need to do. But I just find it redundant to put me back in the situation where I'm at risk."*

Particularly during times of crisis—or at a point when they had exhausted all other resources—some young people either left or sought ways to avoid homelessness services and entered into situations of 'hidden' or concealed homelessness. Their accounts of periods spent living 'off grid' invariably emphasised hardships, vulnerabilities and risks. These

young people were invisible to service providers, had limited access to any form of formal or informal support and most subsequently re-entered the homeless service system.

Conclusion

Housing affordability and availability emerged as key drivers of homelessness and housing exclusion among the study's young people. These structural barriers of access to housing were compounded, in many cases, by young people's complex support needs (related primarily to substance misuse and mental ill-health), a lack of social and economic resources and their negative experiences within adult service settings, in particular. Many had experienced a sudden withdrawal of service support at the age of 18 years and the move from supported living environments to adult hostels constituted a 'crisis point' for a number. The lack of affordable housing options meant that some young people engaged in distinct strategies in their efforts to carve a route to housing or to living situations that they considered to be preferable to homelessness service environments. However, these living situations were largely unsupported, tenuous and highly unstable in the longer term. This finding points to a need to provide improved protective mechanisms for young people who have 'opted out' of service provision and are living 'off grid' and out of the general remit of homelessness services.

Chapter 8: Discussion And Conclusions

As documented in Chapter 2, the core aim of this qualitative longitudinal study was to trace the flow of events and experiences that impact young people's homelessness and housing trajectories over time. The findings presented in Chapters 3–7 have been concerned primarily with uncovering the drivers of young people's 'journeys' through and out of homelessness and their experiences of accessing housing. Family member perspectives have been included throughout, providing new insights into the dynamic and changing nature of young people's family relationships. This concluding chapter discusses several key findings arising from the research, focusing in particular on:

- Young people's exits from homelessness
- Unsustained exits from homelessness
- Patterns of ongoing and unresolved homelessness
- Facilitators to exiting homelessness
- Barriers to exiting homelessness and threats to housing stability

Young People's Exits from Homelessness

While longitudinal research has demonstrated that exiting homelessness is an achievable goal for many young people (Braciszweski *et al.*, 2016; Mallet *et al.*, 2010; Mayock and Corr, 2013; Mayock *et al.*, 2008; Milburn *et al.*, 2007, 2009), this study's findings have revealed a host of barriers to housing stability. For most of the study's young people, routes out of homelessness were highly constrained, with only a minority having moved to (more) stable housing by Phase 2 of the study.

Low Levels of Young People Exiting Homelessness

As highlighted in Chapter 4, only small number (n = 7 or 24%) of young people were categorised as having exited homelessness and, for some, these exits were tenuous or unstable. The remainder of the study's participants were categorised as 'houseless' (n = 12), 'insecurely housed' (n = 7), 'inadequately housed' (n = 2) or 'roofless' (n = 1), acccording to ETHOS, the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion. These findings contrast strongly with those of an earlier qualitative longitudi-

nal study of homeless youth in Dublin which, at the first point of follow up after a time lapse of just one year, documented positive transitions to (more stable) housing among more than half (57%) of the study's young people (Mayock *et al.*, 2008; Mayock *et al.*, 2011a). With the caveat that the two studies are not necessarily directly comparable, these diverging findings nonetheless signal an increased risk of continued homelessness and housing instability among the current study's young people compared to the cohort of 40 homeless youth who participated in a very similar study almost exactly a decade previously.[1] Compared to research in other jurisdictions, which has documented high rates of youth exiting homelessness, often within a period of months (Braciszewski *et al.*, 2016; Milburn *et al.*, 2007; 2009), the findings of this study highlight significant obstacles to youth achieving housing stability.

The seven young people—including four females and three males—who had exited homelessness by Phase 2 of the study were living either in private rented accommodation (n = 4) or local authority housing (n = 2), while one female participant had moved home. Worthy of note is that these exit destinations—and routes out of homelessness—are somewhat different to those documented by Mayock and colleagues in an earlier longitudinal study (Mayock *et al.*, 2008, 2011a; Mayock and Corr, 2013). At the first point of follow up, Mayock *et al.* (2008, 2011a) identified two exit routes, which they termed 'dependent' and 'independent', respectively. Those young people who exited homelessness in a dependent sense had moved to transitional housing or a State care setting while those who had exited independently had either returned home or were living in private rented accommodation. With the phasing out of transitional housing in Ireland, 'dependent' exit routes out of homelessness in the form of transitional housing are no longer an option for young people, which explains why this path to housing stability is not visible in the current study. This finding merits comment, particularly in relation to Housing First for youth.

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1 The two studies, both qualitative and longitudinal involving the participation of 40 young people, had very similar retention rates at the first point of follow up. However, while just seven young people (24%) in the current study had exited homelessness 18–24 months subsequent to the conduct of baseline interviews, 17 of the young people (57%) in the previous study had moved out of homeless service settings after a period of just one year (Mayock *et al.*, 2008; 2011a).

Implications for Housing First for Youth

Nationally, and particularly in Dublin, where the largest number of homeless young people has been consistently recorded, interventions remain quite firmly focused on the provision of short- and medium-term (hostel) accommodation and only a small number of accommodation services specifically target youth aged 18–25 years. The private rented sector is therefore the primary route to stable housing for young people who experience homelessness and have very little prospect of securing local authority housing. However, as the findings of this study clearly demonstrate, a majority of young people struggled to carve a path to stable housing via the private rented market due primarily to the limited availablity of affordable rental properties.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the research base on Housing First for youth is not well developed and while there is an emerging body of evidence that Housing First works for at least some (Kozloff *et al.*, 2016; Scott and Harrison, 2013), there is currently no consensus on the appropriateness of Housing First for *all* young people (Gaetz, 2014b,c). What is clear, however, is that models of accommodation for youth that fall under the Housing First 'umbrella' take different forms and include transitional or congregate housing models in some jurisdictions, including Ireland.[2]

One of the key criticisms of transitional housing is that, like other 'stepped' or 'staircase' models, it may serve to 'trap' individuals in situations of ongoing homelessness by insisting on a degree of 'readiness' for housing that is contingent on evidence of abstinence from substance use and upon 'acceptable' behaviour and compliance with treatment and/or support programmes (Hansen Loftstrand, 2010; Sahlin, 2005). Nonetheless, youth is itself a period of transition and responses to the housing needs of young people who experience homelessness must be cognisant of their particular situations and their diverse and often complex needs (Gaetz, 2014b). Models of housing that have a strong supported dimension—including congregate sites where youth share living spaces—have

2 Housing First services for youth have been established by Focus Ireland in Limerick, Cork and Waterford and primarily target young people with histories of State care. Focus Ireland also set up a Youth Housing Service in Dublin in 2016. The Limerick projects, which opened in May 2013, cater for young people aged 16–25 years while the Cork project accommodates 18–26 year olds. A scatter-site accommodation model is used in Cork and Limerick while the Waterford service (a residential aftercare service that was reconfigured as a Youth Housing First project) is a congregate site.

been suggested as appropriate for *some* young people (particularly those with multiple support needs) if their success in moving to independent accommodation and sustaining these living situations is to be realised (Gaetz, 2014b; Holtschneider, 2016; Quilgars *et al.*, 2008; Scott and Harrison, 2013). Equally, there is an emerging body of evidence that scattered site Housing First models—alongside the provision of intensive and sustained in-housing support—are successful and cost effective in retaining young people in housing and preventing returns to homelessness (Kozloff *et al.*, 2016; Scott and Harrison, 2013). While the evidence base on these models is limited at present, there is every reason to believe that many young people who experience homelessness will have success in moving *directly* to independent housing with support provided in accordance with a thorough assessment of their preferences and needs.

It is critical that models of Housing First for youth are empirically tested and subjected to rigorous evaluation. According to Pleace (2016), Housing First evaluations should include:

- Process Evaluation—exploring and describing how a service works, including its underlying philosophy, design and essential characteristics;
- Effectiveness Evaluation—addressing the question of what Housing First is achieving and whether it is delivering the outcomes it was designed to deliver; and
- Fidelity—addressing the question of how closely a service follows the core principles of Housing First.

Evaluations of Housing First approaches clearly need to assess housing sustainment (against the intensity of in-housing support provided) but indicators of health and well-being, social integration, cost effectiveness and client satisfaction are also critical (Pleace, 2016). To appraise the impact on populations against targets, monitoring and evaluation systems also need to address issues such as occupancy, length of stay, destinations at exit, income, self-sufficiency and interactions with public systems (Turner, 2014).

Unsustained Exits from Homelessness

While only a minority of young people were housed at the time of follow up, there were many others who had exited homelessness at some point over the course of the study—most often to private rented accommodation—but subsequently returned to homelessnes. This finding points to clear problems related to the *sustainability* of homeless exits, certainly for

a considerable number of young people. The study's longitudinal focus—which permitted a detailed analysis of young people's experiences of homelessness and housing over time—helps to explain why these exits were not successful and led so many back to homelessness services.

The Challenge for Youth of Sustaining Private Rented Sector Housing

As documented in Chapter 6, most of the young people who had experience of the private rented market reported a host of difficulties, not simply related to the challenge of sourcing affordable housing, but also associated with their youth and inexperience of navigating the private rented sector. Many experienced discrimination on the part of landlords because of their age and their status as unemployed and in receipt of rent subsidy. Insecurity of tenure was another commonly reported problem and a number had lost their tenancies abruptly or without sufficient notice. Finally and importantly, a considerable number who moved to private rented accommodation—sometimes on more than one occasion—found the transition to independent living markedly challenging, often because they experienced loneliness and isolation but also because they met with financial difficulties that negatively impacted their ability to maintain rental and other payments (utility bills and so on). Many also struggled to deal with ongoing substance use and mental health problems. In most cases, young people were not offered any form of in-housing support and, among those who did receive visits from outreach, aftercare or housing support workers, most felt that the level of support available to them was not sufficient to enable them to successfully navigate the financial, social and personal challenges associated with living independently. Family members also expressed concern about the lack or absence of support and a number drew particular attention to young people's needs in relation to substance use and mental health, in addition to the more practical matters of money/household management and budgeting.

It appears that a large number of young people who exit homeless or care service systems do not receive adequate or, in some cases any, follow-on support. This may be partly explained by young people taking their own initiative and seeking accommodation independently, often in an attempt to 'disconnect' from homelessness or care services. In these situations, young people may avoid contact with the services they have exited or even refuse (certainly initially) service support. Many of the unsustained exits to private rented accommodation were, in fact, largely unplanned in

the sense that they emerged from young people's efforts to 'escape' hostel life. Moreover, as documented in Chapter 7, young people frequently expressed a sense of service fatigue, as well as a loss of faith in a system that rendered them 'faceless' and without a belief that their homelessness could or would be resolved.

Implications for Post-homelessness Support

Solutions to youth homelessness are not simply about young people moving into housing and most will need support to help them to "recover and achieve independence" (Gaetz, 2014b: 3). There is a spectrum of personal, social and health needs for which young people may require assistance, both prior and subsequent to accessing stable housing, and these will vary depending on their level of engagement with family, school and the labour market, as well as any specific issues (drug use, mental ill-health, parenting challenges, domestic violence, and so on) affecting their lives.

The young people in this study who exited temporarily to housing but subsequently returned to homelessness typically faced individual level (substance use and/or mental health, managing peer relationships) and structural (poor quality accommodation, lack of income, challenges in obtaining benefits, difficulties in accessing education/employment) barriers that undermined their efforts to sustain housing. The resources and supports available to these young people were clearly inadequate, pointing to a pressing need for enhanced interventions for young people *following* the transition out of homelessness. While some young people may only need assistance for a short time, others will require sustained, intensive support if they are to successfully sustain independent housing.

Patterns of Ongoing and Unresolved Homelessness

The extent to which young people reported 'houselessness', 'insecure' and 'inadequate' housing at Phase 2 of the study, all of which constitute 'homelessness' according to ETHOS, is significant. Just one young person was 'roofless' or sleeping rough at the time of follow up, confirming that only a minority of homeless youth are likely to be *literally* homeless (as in sleeping on the streets) at any given time, even if many more will have slept rough either episodically or occasionally.

'Houseless' Youth

Those young people who were 'houseless' by Phase 2 (n = 12) were, in the main, accessing homelessness services in the form of STAs, ETAs or B&B accommodation. Unlike those who were insecurely or inadequately housed, these young people were 'visible' to the service system and also counted as homeless. The vast majority expressed high levels of anxiety about their situations and many reported increased substance use and/or criminal justice contact since the time they first accessed hostel accommodation via the homeless service sector. A majority also reported high levels of movement between services, which diminished their ability to form meaningful relationships with service providers and/or re-engage with education, maintain engagement with substance use treatment programmes, and access support that might enable them to make a planned exit from homelessness services.

Insecure Housing and Patterns of Hidden Homelessness

Young people who reported insecure housing at the time of follow up (n = 7) were typically living in precarious housing situations, including the family home, but more often in situations of 'hidden' homelessness, that is, living temporarily with a family member, friends or the family of a romantic partner. All were at risk of re-entering homelessness services because their living situations were unsustainable in the longer term. Furthermore, these young people—like others residing in inadequate housing (n = 2), typically in overcrowded living situations—were not 'registered' or counted as homeless, which means that their homelessness was concealed from the service system.

As highlighted in Chapter 7, periods spent living 'off grid', essentially in situations of concealed homelessness, were widely reported. This pattern of moving out of 'official' sites of homelessness had a number of distinctive features. First, it appears that some young people felt that 'getting out' of homeless, care or aftercare service systems was preferable to remaining in settings where they perceived few prospects of securing stable housing. In other cases, the loss of accommodation in the private rented sector or difficulties arising following a return home precipitated the move into situations of 'hidden' homelessness. Second, irrespective of the circumstances that led young people to what were often informal living arrangements, these transitions were invariably short lived and many subsequently returned to homelessness services. Finally, those who were living in inse-

cure housing of this kind by Phase 2 of the study almost always reported overcrowded or undesirable living conditions; most were not accessing formal support services and typically reported anxiety about the prospect of having to (again) re-enter the homeless service sector.

Implications for Preventing Patterns of Repeat Homelessness

There are a range of classifications of homelessness prevention (see, for example, Shinn, 2004; Pawson and Davidson, 2008). Prevention measures at the primary and secondary levels aim to reduce the risk of homelessness and prevent individuals from becoming homeless in the first instance. Tertiary level preventive strategies, then, target individuals already affected by homelessness and focus on reducing the risk of repeat or recurring homelessness, as Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick (2008: 73) explain: "The preventative emphasis at this level is more often focused on minimising 'repeat homelessness', that is, avoiding the occurrence of entirely new homelessness episodes".[3] Ensuring tenancy sustainment is central to preventing repeat homelessness where there is an underlying need for support to keep someone in their home (Shelter, 2016). Supporting young people who have experienced homelessness to develop positive social networks is seen as another means to support resettlement, improve young people's well being and reduce the risk of repeat homelessness (Watts *et al.*, 2015).

Many young people in this study were at risk of returning to homelessness services because they were living 'off grid', essentially situations of 'hidden' homelessness. These young people had almost always been moving 'in and out' of a range of emergency or short-term accommodation settings for a considerable period of time, which points to systems failures, particularly in terms of finding realistic and sustainable solutions to their homelessness. When young people re-enter the homeless service sector it is essential that their situations—and the reasons for their recurrent homelessness—are fully assessed. These young people's needs are likely to be more complex than 'newly' homeless youth or those for whom homelessness is a short-lived or transitional experience (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013), signalling a need to differentiate between those young people who experience short-term homelessness from those who are more episodically or recurrently homeless.

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3 In Ireland, the measures outlined in the *Homeless Preventative Strategy* (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002) are confined largely to secondary preventive measures (Maher and Allen, 2014).

Facilitators to Exiting Homelessness

The study's longitudinal data permitted a detailed exploration of the process of exiting homelessness, including turning points, facilitators and the impact that transitioning to stable housing had on young people's relationships, identity and health.

Family and Informal Supports

Consistent with previous research conducted in Ireland and elsewhere (Mallet *et al.*, 2010; Mayock *et al.,* 2008, 2011b; Mayock and Corr, 2013; Milburn *et al.*, 2007; Nebbitt *et al.*, 2007), family support emerged as an important enabler to young people as they transitioned out of homelessness services. For a number of young women in the study, learning of a pregnancy constituted a significant 'turning point' and an experience that led them to reconcile their differences with their mothers, in particular, with three young women having returned home early in their pregnancies. 'Home' provided these young women with material and emotional support as they came to terms with the life-changing experience of becoming and being a parent. It is perhaps important to note that these transitions out of homelessness occurred largely independent of the homeless service sector insofar as returns home were negotiated by young people themselves, almost always in the absence of pre-exiting or follow-on support.

While these young women valued the practical and emotional support they received from their mothers and other family members, their accounts also strongly suggest that there were numerous stresses associated with living at home, particularly in the context of overcrowded living conditions. This, coupled with their desire for greater autonomy and independence, meant that at least some moves home were insecure and almost certainly not workable in the longer term. Previous research in Ireland has demonstrated that moving home is often not a sustainable option for many homeless youth, particularly with the passing of time (Mayock *et al.*, 2011b). Furthermore, many young people who do transition out of homelessness services to the family home will require formal post-homelessness support and such supports need to be tailored to meet the specific needs of young parents (Gaetz, 2014b).

Importantly, among a number who had not transitioned to stable housing by Phase 2 of the study, there was also evidence that family reconciliation, as well as enhanced levels of family contact, served an enabling function. Irrespective of where young people were living, sustained family

contact and improved family relationships enhanced their sense of belong-ing and also provided an important safety net at paticular points of need. It is perhaps significant in this context that a key characteristic of rec-ommended practice for Housing First for youth is the emphasis placed on family reconnection, inclucing "the potential of reconciling damaged relationships" (Gaetz, 2014b: 17). Some young people may opt for or carve a route back home; however, for those for whom a return home is not possible, the move to independent housing can be significantly *supported* by family.

Formal Support Systems

Young people who had exited homelessness by Phase 2 of the study fre-quently talked about the role of professional supports in enabling them to navigate what was often depicted as a daunting and intimidating task of sourcing and securing housing. Certainly, those young people who had positive and trusted connections with service professionals appeared to benefit from these relationships. The kinds of formal supports that young people reported ranged from practical support in obtaining housing to advice and assistance on how to access various welfare supports (for example, social welfare and rent supplement payments). All of this was important because, very often, young people did not have a good grasp or understanding of their entitlements or how to go about securing financial assistance.

When aftercare services and supports were available to young people, they facilitated a smoother transition from care to housing. However, in instances where care leavers were no longer able to access or avail of aftercare provision (for reasons related to non-engagement in education or following discharge from a residential aftercare service, for example) challenges were reported, particularly as they transitioned from child to adult services of intervention. For young people leaving State care and many others who first experienced homelessness as teenagers, reaching the age of 18 years was a point of particular vulnerability. Welfare systems frequently fail to properly address the difficulties faced by young people when in transition to adulthood and throughout Europe—including in Ireland—government departments responsible for catering for the needs of young people vary depending on whether they are under 18 years or older (FEANTSA, 2011). Consequently, "lack of coordination may lead to a situation where young people, and in particular young people at risk,

are denied access to their rights, the support they need and may become homeless" (FEANTSA, 2011: 3).

The Process of Exiting Homelessness

Exiting homelessness is not simply and 'event' but rather an incremental process (Karabanow *et al.*, 2016; Kidd *et al.*, 2016; Mayock and Corr, 2013) that involves multiple transitions—as well as setbacks and upheavals, in many cases—both prior and subsequent to the achievement of housing stability. Thus, when young people exit homelessness, success in maintaining housing tends to be accompanied by positive development in other domains. For example, a large number in the current study—including those who had exited homelessness and others who had not achieved housing stability by Phase 2 of the study—emphasised the benefits of distancing themselves from street-based settings and homeless peers. A majority had also tried to re-engage with education, although only a small number (four young people) were employed by Phase 2 of the study while two others were participating in a Community Employment scheme. Employment provided young people with certainty and security and relieved the burden of ongoing anxiety about debt or falling into debt; it also endowed a strong sense of achievement, purpose and independence. In contrast, those young people who were not employed or successfully engaging in training or education programmes (often because their transience precluded such engagement) felt that their efforts to move out of homelessness were constantly mired by their limited prospects of earning an income and any measure of financial security. These young people were essentially trapped in systems of interventions that blocked, rather than supported, a route to independence.

Access to housing—whilst a crucial first step—does not necessarily mark a lasting resolution to young people's homelessness (Kidd *et al.*, 2016; Yanos *et al.*, 2004). This is because most will experience challenges as they embark on a new housing 'journey' and seek to establish and maintain independence. Greater and sustained stability of living circumstances is therefore a negotiated process that is emergent and ongoing rather than abrupt or final. Most young people will require and benefit from some level of support as they transition from homelessness to independent living and attempt to succeed in attaining broader life goals. A considerable number will require ongoing and intensive support in relation to education, employment, integration, substance use and mental health if they are to have a reasonable chance of maintaining housing.

Implications for Enhancing Support Structures that Promote Homeless Exits

When young people enter into the homeless service sector, tailored interventions need to be put in place at the earliest possible juncture. These need to be multi-faceted, developed in consultation with young people and acknowledge their personal preferences and priorities. The aim of moving young people to stable housing must be accompanied by supports that enable them to maintain housing and adjust to the experience of being housed.

The potential of family members to support homeless young people is an under-used resource (Mayock *et al.*, 2011b), even if family reconciliation/re-unification is increasingly recognised as playing a critical enabling role for youth, both prior and subsequent to the transition to independent housing (Braciszewski *et al.*, 2016; Milburn *et al.*, 2009; Tevendale *et al.*, 2011). Developing family reconnection programmes must, therefore, be seen as a central component of a systems-based approach to resolving youth homelessness (Winland, 2013). Systems-based approaches must also attend to assisting young people into education, training and employment and address any problems related to substance use, mental health and/or other issues (for example, pregnancy, parenthood) affecting their lives.

Positive Youth Development (PYD), which underpins models of Housing First for youth (Gaetz, 2014b,c), provides a useful systems-based practice framework for working with young people during and following the transition to housing. The PYD model means that practice is focused not simply on meeting basic client needs but also on supporting *recovery*. Gaetz (2014b: 11) explains:

> For young people, the recovery orientation must be solidly framed in terms of a positive youth development orientation. That is, rather than merely focusing on risk and deficits, models of support must emphasize an assets-based approach that incorporates an understanding of the physical, cognitive, emotional and social needs of the developing adolescent. It must build on the strengths, talents and dreams of young people, and work towards enhancing protective factors and resilience.

Positive Youth Development recognises that many homeless young people have experienced trauma that can compromise their cognitive and emotional development and undermine their ability to form trusting relationships. It therefore focuses on the transition to independent living but also on supporting healthy transitions more broadly, including the promotion of social and community integration, which is a strong determinant of housing stability (Roy *et al.*, 2016; Slesnick *et al.*, 2008).

Barriers to Exiting Homelessness and Threats to Housing Stability

This study's findings have highlighted *multiple* economic and systematic constraints of access to independent accommodation. Among these, conditions within the housing market and in the private rented sector, in particular, meant that housing stability was simply out of reach for a majority.

Highly Constrained Housing Options

A lack of affordable and appropriate housing was the single most significant barrier to young people exiting homelessness. Problems associated with an unaffordable rental market were exacerbated by the poor standard of more affordable rental properties, the restrictive rent supplement payments available to young people and refusals on the part of landlords to accept tenants in receipt of rent subsidy. Like those who were unable to maintain their tenancies and subsequently returned to homelessness services, young people's lack of experience of navigating the private rented sector created problems and many appeared not to have access to formal supports as they attempted to source and secure accommodation.

Threats to Housing Security

Numerous threats to housing security also emerged from the accounts of the study's young people, including those who had exited homelessness by Phase 2. Young people were typically entering housing at the lowest end of the quality spectrum and their living conditions were often sub-standard. This meant that, while many had accessed housing, sometimes on a number of separate occasions, they did not in fact experience housing stability. Movement between rented accommodations was commonly reported as young people searched for better living conditions or were forced to leave a rental property following notice issued by a landlord. While multiple moves as part of a "stable upgrading process" has been shown to be a sign of stability (rather than instability) among homeless youth as they transition to stable housing (Fredrick *et al.*, 2014: 971), any such 'upgrading' in terms of the quality of housing was not possible for a majority in the current study due primarily to problems of affordability. Indeed, young people were far more likely to return to the homeless service system than to progress to better and more appropriate rental accommodation.

A strong message to emerge from the accounts of those young people who temporarily exited but subsequently returned to homelessness is that many

appeared to be unable to successfully navigate the transition to independent housing. Clearly, the poor quality of the accommodation posed problems but several also appeared not to have the skills to manage money and budgets and a large number experienced loneliness and isolation. As stated earlier, there was also evidence of a lack or absence of follow-on support following the move to rental accommodation and, among those who did have access to such support, several deemed it to be insufficient or too short-lived to meet their needs. Thus, when instabilities were experienced by young people, their housing situations were frequently threatened or fell through.

Substance Use and Mental Health Problems

Substance use problems and relapse can pose a significant threat to housing security (Fredrick *et al.*, 2014) and also act as a barrier to housing access (Cheng *et al.*, 2013; Roy *et al.*, 2011, 2016). As documented in Chapter 6, young people who had a history of substance use problems and had succeeded in curbing or ceasing use frequently worried about their ability to maintain that status and were aware that relapse would almost certainly threaten their housing security; problems with drugs and/or alcohol also led to financial troubles and strained relationships with family members, friends and landlords. Many who were 'houseless' (that is, living in homeless service settings, including ETAs and STAs) at the time of follow up had become further entrenched in drug and/or alcohol use, leading to further hardship and increasing their risk of criminal justice contact. The challenge of ongoing mental health difficulties was also significant for a large number. A sense of disempowerment emerged strongly from the accounts of these young people as they recounted ongoing patterns of mobility, a continued reliance on emergency hostel accommodation, difficulties in forming and sustaining relationships with service staff and a general feeling that their situations and the challenges they faced were not fully understood. Many had lost faith in the service system because they had been 'cycling' through short- or medium-term accommodation for lengthy periods and could not envisage a way out of homelessness.

Implications for Preventing and Interrupting Long-term Homeless Trajectories

Previous research, both in Ireland and internationally, has stressed the importance of early exits from homelessness (Mallet *et al.*, 2010; Milburn *et al.*, 2009; Mayock and Corr, 2013; Quilgars *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore,

the risks posed to individuals who embark on cycles of ongoing or unresolved homelessness have been consistently highlighted in earlier Irish research on both youth and adult populations (Mayock *et al.*, 2008; 2013, 2015; Mayock and Corr, 2013). It is difficult to predict the future housing prospects of those young people who had not achieved stability of housing by Phase 2 of the study. However, what we do know is that the longer the duration of homelessness, the more challenging it becomes to exit and sucessfully sustain an exit from homelessnes (Karabanow and Naylor, 2014; Mayock and Corr, 2013; O'Grady *et al.*, 2011), even if youth can achieve residential stability after relatively lengthy periods of homelessness (Roy *et al.*, 2016). It follows that young people who remain in the homeless service system for longer will need sustained and intensive support if they are to successfully carve a route to independent living (Gaetz, 2014b). Apart from providing a roof over their heads and access to basic needs such as food, washing and laundry facilities, ongoing contact with adult systems of intervention is damaging and also undesirable for young people, particularly if their engagement with these service systems is prolonged. Secure housing—alongside the provision of additional services and supports as needed—must be seen as the an essential first step in the resolution of their homelessness.

Concluding Comments

The findings of this longitudinal study demonstrate the very serious risks posed to youth who experience homelessness. Practically all of the study's young people entered into situations of homelessness at a crisis point, having experienced home-based difficulties and multiple traumatic life experiences (Mayock *et al.*, 2014). Yet, they demonstrated enormous resilience and a sophisticated understanding of their life experiences and situations, both past and present. They mainly aspired to achieving stability in their lives, to having a place to call home and opportunities to reach their potential.

The policy and service goal of providing young people with the safety and security of a stable home had not been realised for the vast majority in the study following a two-year period, meaning that most remained homeless or were living in highly insecure and precarious living situations. This failure to resolve their homelessness meant that a large number had already joined the 'ranks' of the episodic or long-term homeless by Phase 2 of the research. If trajectories of youth homelessness are not interrupted, the

homeless service sector essentially becomes a 'feeder' for adult homelessness, creating blockages in the system and perpetuating instability in young lives, at an enormous cost to young people and society. The negative consequences of ongoing homelessness for young people's health and well-being—and for their prospects of 'moving on' and achieving security in their lives—have been consistently highlighted by research. Likewise, the economic costs of 'warehousing' homeless individuals in emergency and short-term homeless hostels are well documented (O'Sullivan, 2016; Pleace, 2015), with sustained or long-term homelessness leading to higher levels of public expenditure (Culhane *et al.*, 2013; Flatau *et al.*, 2008).

One of the outcomes of increasingly nuanced and robust understandings of homelessness is that "responses to homelessness must incorporate the diversities of a relevant target group", including responses "that are clearly not homogenous" (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007: 645). Homelessness policy needs to directly address the situations of *young* homeless people, underpinned by a recognition that their experiences and needs differ from those of older adults, and include a more strategic approach to improving young people's access to housing and relevant support services. The development and expansion of housing models and options for homeless young people—including Housing First approaches—requires urgent attention. All housing programmes targeting youth must be subjected to rigorous evaluation to ensure a systematic, evidence-based understanding of which models are best suited to meeting the developmental, social, educational and residential needs of homeless young people.

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Appendix: ETHOS-Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

Concept		Operational Category	Living Situation
Rooflessness	1	People living rough	Where people are living without shelter (e.g. on the streets or in public spaces)
	2	People staying in emergency accommodation (i.e. night shelters)	Where people with no usual place of residence are using emergency shelters on a night by night basis
Houselessness	3	People in homeless accommodation	Where people are temporarily living in homeless hostels, temporary accommodation or transitional supported accommodation
	4	People in women's shelters (i.e. refuges)	Where women are temporarily accommodated due to experiences of domestic violence
	5	People in accommodation for migrants	Where migrants are living in reception centres or migrant workers' accommodation due to their immigrant status
	6	People due to be released from institutions (i.e. prisons, residential drug/alcohol treatment, hospitals and children's homes)	Where people are at risk of homelessness due to support needs and a lack of suitable move-on housing following their stay in an institutional setting
	7	People receiving longer-term support due to homelessness	Where people are living in long-term supported accommodation, or are unable to move on from supported accommodation, due to a lack of suitable housing
Insecure	8	People living in insecure accommodation	Where people are residing in insecure living situations with no legal rights or (sub) tenancies (e.g. squatting, illegal camping, sofa surfing, sleeping on floors, staying with friends or relatives)
	9	People living under threat of eviction	Where legal orders for eviction from accommodation or repossession of property are operative
	10	People living under threat of violence	Where police action is taken to ensure a place of safety for people experiencing violence
Inadequate	11	People living in temporary/non-standard structures	Where people are residing in temporary or semi-permanent structures (e.g. mobile homes, make-shift shelters, huts, cabins)
	12	People living in unfit housing	Where people are living in accommodation that is considered unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations
	13	People living in extreme overcrowding	Where people are living in accommodation that exceeds the national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms

Source: FEANTSA (2006)