

The Fostering Network's Young People's Project supported lodgings



report **2007**

the fostering network
the voice of foster care



What is **supported lodgings**? Where does supported lodgings fit – within fostering, leaving care or on its own? Should the needs of both vulnerable young people and care leavers be met within the same service? What are the advantages of in-house provision as opposed to being delivered by a voluntary organisation or private provider? Would a set of standards and guidance endorsed by central government achieve more consistency and raise the profile and status of supported lodgings.

This report is based on the findings from two workshops held in January 2007 in London and Halton (NW). The events brought together 115 managers and practitioners from 48 local authorities and voluntary organisations. The planning and delivery was undertaken by the Fostering Network's Young People's Project in partnership with John Short, independent trainer and consultant with specialist expertise in leaving care; NW supported lodgings forum and NLCAS (National Leaving Care Advisory Service). The objectives were to:

- *Explore current themes and trends relating to supported lodgings schemes for looked-after children and former relevant children*.*
- *Identify policies, procedures/guidance and materials/resources required for establishing and maintaining supported lodgings .*

**Although the main focus was on care leavers it is recognised that supported lodgings is a proven option for vulnerable homeless 16- and 17-year-olds, with many providers offering placements and support to both so any materials and guidance revised or developed will have relevance for all young people and providers.*

Currently, supported lodgings is a 'Cinderella' service, particularly in relation to care leavers. Often schemes continuity and success depend heavily upon the person delivering the scheme, yet it continues to be a proven first choice option for many young people. So, these workshops were not intended as an end in themselves but as part of a process of improving the image of, as well as bringing some standardisation into, supported lodgings

This report is set out along the lines of the workshop programme, ending with a future action plan which, subject to funding, will form the basis of work to be taken forward by a small working group. It begins with an outline of the advantages and components of supported lodgings drawn from the limited research available and is followed by a precis of the current issues and good practice ideas as outlined by the key note presenters, workshop leaders and practitioners. It ends with the **wish list** presented by NWSLF, which will underpin the future **action plan**.

what does supported lodgings offer young people?

Supported lodgings is a transitional resource which offers young people:

- *A period of stability in which to take advantage of educational and training opportunities, so increasing their life chances/opportunities.*
- *Consistent adult support in varying degrees, which can change over time within the placement (eg hands-off approach at the beginning, but at exam time, or if ill, more dependence on the provider). Alternatively, some young people require intensive support at the beginning, reducing as they develop confidence and skills.*
- *Modelling – learning how different households/providers work and how they deal with mistakes.*
- *An opportunity to test and develop the day-to-day skills needed to survive in the world.*
- *A resource that requires negotiation on both sides (a necessary skill to surviving in adult life).*
- *Variety – providers come in all shapes, sizes and backgrounds so can match to the young people.*
- *Normality – local resource which allows for anonymity – reduces stigma of being labelled as 'mad' or 'bad' which is so often the layperson's understanding of being in care.*
- *Conversion from fostering to supported lodgings allows for continuity of existing foster care arrangements.*



the legislative context

Reference to supported lodgings within legislation and guidance is limited but the recent white paper *Care Matters: time for change* sets out the Government's intentions of extending some fostering placements to 21. This has implications for supported lodgings and corporate parenting. Also, the announcement by Ruth Kelly on 14 November on the Government's new homelessness strategy *Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives* recognises that young people can become homeless for a wide range of often complex reasons. The Government intends to work with local authorities and voluntary organisations to:

- *Prevent vulnerable young people becoming homeless, through early identification and intervention.*
- *Support homeless young people and those living in temporary accommodation to ensure their housing and wider non-housing needs are met.*
- *Ensure that young people continue to receive the support they need when they move from temporary to settled accommodation.*

The accompanying package of measures includes:

- *A commitment to ending the use of B&Bs by local authorities in discharging their homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds, unless there is no suitable alternative and then for periods no longer than six weeks, by 2010.*
- *Improving access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people) so that there is a universal expectation of such services.*
- *Establishing supported lodgings schemes across the country and providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home by launching a new national supported lodgings development scheme.*

Useful policies and guidance that need to be in place in every supported lodgings scheme

Statement of purpose
Service profile
Child protection/
Safer caring policy
Vulnerable adults

Health and Safety
Drugs
Recruitment
Guidance for young people
Equal opportunities

Complaints
Finance
Service level agreements
Providers licence agreement
Young person's agreement



what works in supported lodgings?

The following sections briefly cover key aspects of successfully setting up and managing a supported lodgings scheme.

Each scheme needs to define:

- *What is the purpose of the scheme?*
- *Which young people is the scheme targeting?*
- *Is it a planned or emergency service?*
- *What level of support is being offered?*
- *How does it fit into other services?*
- *What is process for converting fostering placements to supported lodgings?*

recruitment and assessment

What attracts people to come forward to become supported lodgings providers? What methods work? What needs to be covered in an assessment? Is BAAF's form F applicable? Is a competency-based approach more appropriate?

Tips for maximising recruitment:

- *Run adverts in newspaper for three or four consecutive days.*
- *Remember people consider acting usually after they have seen an advert a couple of times.*
- *Get an agreement with your local paper to regularly insert adverts and feature articles.*
- *Remember to target your recruitment because many young people will not move out of a very small geographical area, no matter how good the provider.*
- *Money does attract people initially.*
- *Remember **word of mouth** works best!*

They are interested – now what?

- *Contact immediately.*
- *Take or post information.*
- *Leave information for them to look through, for example licence agreement, gas safety information, 'Letting a room in your home' guide or information on the scheme.*
- *Coffee evening to meet support staff, existing providers and young people – make it relaxed and maybe have a quiz or a theme (eg health and safety).*
- *Remember they are ordinary members of the public so watch the jargon and no counselling!*

The assessment

What needs to be covered?

Two parts – **the applicant** and **the property**

The applicant(s)

- *Who is in the household?*
- *Ex-partners.*
- *Is the potential provider fit and healthy?*
- *Checks – CRB, personal, medical, NSPCC, etc.*
- *Family pets – do you need to do a pet questionnaire?*
- *Work background and skills.*
- *Do they like young people and what experience have they had working/caring for young people?*
- *Understanding of equal opportunities/inclusion and identify any training needed.*
- *Expectations and wishes.*
- *Limitations.*
- *If conversion of a foster placement to supported lodgings, then need to do skills audit to ensure providers understand new roles, responsibilities and differences.*

The property

- *Standard of the building.*
- *The room.*
- *The facilities.*
- *House rules.*

'If it is not good enough for your own, why accept it for these young people? I inherited a scheme with twelve providers but within the year I had five left and I built up again'.

*Supported lodgings scheme
co-ordinator*

The London region has a basic assessment pack that meets the needs of looked-after young people who require placements that meet the fostering regulations but can be used more loosely to meet the needs of vulnerable young people. There is a general agreement that **the use of Form F is not suited to supported lodgings** but there must be a rigorous assessment so appropriate safeguards are in place. A revision of the London pack was planned, taking into account other assessment materials and processes, but Shelter is developing a pack which will replace it.

training

Would a national core-training programme be useful? If so, what should it cover? Given time constraints, what are the key topics and what, if any, are optional? What should be covered in core training and what is post-approval training?

CHALLENGES	GOOD PRACTICE SOLUTIONS
No comprehensive training programme and variable take-up	A national training pack Accreditation Mandatory training for providers as part of core requirements with possibility of de-registration if non-compliant
Fostering services and PAs need to receive training around supported lodgings	Cross training between teams Training for PAs Joint training for foster carers and supported lodgings providers
Empowering providers to take on young people with more complex needs	Deliver core training targeted around client groups for example young people with learning difficulties or needs, for example drug/alcohol abuse

Core training must cover the following key areas: *Roles and responsibilities, health and safety, protection from abuse (Child/vulnerable adult protection – including risk-assessment), safe working practices, planning for placements and ongoing support, diversity and inclusion, advocacy, empowerment and complaints/commendations.*

Targeted training – *Managing challenging behaviour, mental wellbeing, alcohol and substance misuse and self-harm, education, training and employment.*

support

What makes for good support? What are the current gaps? The gaps and good practice in services that affect the support given to providers are set out in the table below.

GAPS	GOOD PRACTICE
Staff shortages	Support needs to be based on a clear definition of supported lodgings and national standards that underpin good practice taking into account NAAPS standards
Lack of sufficient number and range of providers	Need for guides for professionals and providers and/or a welcome back for new providers (<i>Knowing me, knowing you</i>)
Lack of knowledge	Implications of changing from a fostering to a supported lodgings placement needs to be clearly set out in writing
Limited funding	Six weekly training and support group using skills of providers has proved successful between all members of team and services
Limited or unsuitable move on accommodation	Good bridges, for example between leaving care and fostering; schemes and housing providers
Ability to offer structured training and access to support networks	Clear information on finance issues for providers and agencies given varying payments and how they are made up (evidenced opposite)
Limited or no out of hours service for providers	
Need more PAs to better support the young people	Resource issue

finance

This is acknowledged to be a complex and varied issue, depending on the young person's age, legal status and provider's individual circumstances. John Short has produced, with the Fostering Network, leaflets on how the different rules apply (see [resources](#) below).

the way forward

The future action plan is based on the presentation given by Debra Hesford on behalf of the NWSLF but it encapsulates the thinking and views of all those who attended both events.

The Vision

- *A nationally agreed clarification and definition of supported lodgings for young people aged 16 to 21 (up to 25 for those with special needs) who are not ready to live independently.*
- *For every town/region to have a supported lodgings scheme available to all homeless and vulnerable young people, including care leavers, so ensuring they have access to safe, secure and stable accommodation to help them build their futures and enable them to make positive contributions to society and give them a better quality of life.*
- *For all schemes to work to a shared set of standards so projects deliver consistent services, are able to share good practice and make bench marking a valid exercise.*
- *To secure recognition, support and monitoring of supported lodgings schemes from central Government.*
- *For supported lodgings to be seen as a viable option in its own right as part of an accommodation strategy for young people aged 16+.*

To achieve this vision, the work plan will include:

- *Achieving acceptance of an agreed definition of supported lodgings; an acceptance that supported lodgings should be an integral part of any accommodation strategy for care leavers and vulnerable /homeless young people.*
- *Campaign to raise the profile of supported lodgings, particularly within central Government, and contribute to proposed national developments for reducing homelessness among young people.*
- *Adoption nationally of the standards formulated and used by agencies in the NW region.*
- *Compiling a draft training programme based on existing work being undertaken by NW forum.*
- *Revise and make nationally available the assessment materials developed by the London and SE region.*
- *Secure funding for a national supported lodgings coordinator.*
- *Action research programme.*

resources

Supported Lodgings: a golden opportunity by Dr Bob Broad and Ena Fry, from **RHP Companion to Leaving Care** by Ann Wheal (2002; Russell house Publications)

Fact sheets from the Fostering Network (available from Fosterline on 0800 040 7675)

Financial arrangements post-18: sources of funding for young people

Information sheet for foster carers: financial arrangements post-18

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