

# **Youth Homelessness and the Role of the Educational Psychologist**

Submitted by Poppy Lara Lopez to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in Educational Child and Community Psychology in November 2020.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signed: . . . . .

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my family, friends, supervisors and TEPs for your support and encouragement.

Thank you to each of the six young people who took the time to meet with me. Your story of resilience, determination and success, despite the challenges that you have encountered, will encourage and inspire other young people. Your responses were insightful, reflective and articulate, they deserve to be heard and acted upon at the highest level.

Thank you to the support workers who shared their views, and to all staff who helped me to get in touch with ex residents. When interviewing the young people, the trust, appreciation and admiration that they have for you, shone through. Through the power of positive relationships, you are changing young people's lives.

Thank you to the EPs who took the time to reflect on each one of the young people's stories. Your compassion and creativity brought a valuable perspective to the current research.

## Abstract

During 2018/19, in the UK, an estimated 110,000 young people (YP) approached their local authority because they were either experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. Homelessness is associated with decreased life expectancy, for example, due to drug and alcohol misuse and suicide. This emphasises the importance of early intervention; if YP can be supported to exit homelessness and achieve positive outcomes, this could not only improve their quality of life, but potentially save their life.

Since educational psychologists (EPs) now work with young adults, it is important to think beyond promoting inclusion in schools, towards promoting inclusion in the wider community through preparation for adulthood. Many educational psychology services are adopting a traded model of service delivery; this is a good opportunity for EPs to expand their role into the community. It could be argued that the job title 'educational psychologist' is restrictive, since it may imply that EPs only work within education. Exeter graduates, however, hold the extended title of educational, child and *community* psychologist; this thesis will focus on the community psychology role.

I set out to explore YP's perceptions around what enabled them to exit homelessness and achieve positive outcomes, complimented by support workers (SWs) perspectives. I also aimed to capture and promote the potential role and contribution of EPs within a youth homelessness organisation.

Phase 1 involved semi structured interviews with six YP who had previously experienced homelessness and focus groups with SWs from a youth homelessness organisation. Phase 2 consisted of a focus group with EPs; discussion was based around vignettes developed using each of the YP's interviews.

Data was analysed using thematic analysis. YP discussed a range of factors that supported them to overcome homelessness, including positive, trusting relationships, particularly with their support workers. Being intrinsically

motivated to engage in further education and/or employment was also key to their success. YP also described potential barriers to positive outcomes. Most YP reflected upon difficulties during their school years, and yet, had never met an EP to their knowledge. In line with YP's views, SWs described person-centred support and positive relationships as the foundations for enabling positive outcomes, while aspects of the welfare system created barriers to positive outcomes. SWs discussed how continued professional development, educational psychology support and teamwork helps them to do the job well.

The EP focus group highlighted the current and potential role of EPs both in schools and in the community, in relation to supporting YP experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. EPs highlighted that having more time to engage in preventative, systemic practice will be key in developing their role as community psychologists.

It is hoped that this research will support other educational psychology services to enhance and promote their community psychology offer.

**Key Words:**

Homelessness, youth homelessness, young people, positive outcomes, support workers, educational psychologists, educational psychology, qualitative, interviews, focus groups, thematic analysis.

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## List of Abbreviations

PEH	People Experiencing Homelessness *
YPEH	Young People Experiencing Homelessness
SA	Supported Accommodation **
EP/s	Educational Psychologist/s
YP	Young People (I will write young person out in full when singular).
SW	Support Worker
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
In EET	In Education, Employment or Training
P4A	Preparation for Adulthood
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
CPD	Continued Professional Development
PIEs	Psychologically Informed Environments
SDT	Self Determination Theory

\* PEH: People Experiencing Homelessness, rather than homeless people. I prefer to use the former terminology as it puts the person first, rather than their circumstances.

\*\* I undertook my research within a youth homelessness organisation; to protect the anonymity of the organisation I will refer to it as Supported Accommodation (SA).

In this version of the thesis, some participant numbers and illustrations have been redacted to help protect participant anonymity. Redacted participant numbers are shown as P█.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

I will introduce this thesis by describing my personal and professional motives for choosing to conduct my research within the field of youth homelessness. I will highlight key people and experiences that helped to shape the direction of this research.

Whilst studying for my undergraduate psychology degree, I volunteered for a charity that provided evening meals for people experiencing homelessness (PEH). I enjoyed listening to people's life stories, which many of them were keen to tell. They appeared to value having someone to talk to, just as much as having a hot meal. These were people in society who often did not have a voice; their requests for help were ignored repeatedly, as people walk past them in the street.

As a trainee educational psychologist (TEP), a core value of mine is to listen to the voices of people who have less power in society, or who have been overlooked in the past, as stated by the British Psychological Society (2018):

Psychologists value the dignity and worth of all persons, with sensitivity to the dynamics of perceived authority or influence over persons and peoples and with particular regard to people's rights (p.5)

Holding these values close to my heart yet living in a society where people so visibly have less power creates a strong sense of cognitive dissonance. Harris and Fiske (2011) explored why homeless people are often ignored in society. Findings suggest that PEH can be dehumanised in people's minds, and therefore people automatically disengage with what PEH might be thinking and feeling. I wanted to use my thesis as an opportunity for PEH to share their story, so that others listen and remain curious about what PEH might be thinking and feeling.

When researching homelessness as a potential thesis topic, I came across the Clinical Psychology Forum article 'Homelessness – The Extreme of Social Exclusion'. In this Forum, Clinical Psychologist, Jade Weston, recommended London's "Unseen Tours"; an organisation whereby PEH have an income by

providing walking tours around London, giving insight into their life on the streets (Weston, 2015). Weston's experience of the walking tour shaped her understanding and development of the article. I therefore travelled to London to experience this for myself. Alongside the literature review, this experience helped to shape my approach to the current research.

I shared with the unseen tour guide that I intended to interview YP who had experienced positive outcomes. They felt that this would be important as it would show that homeless people "are not bums". Norman (2015) suggests that there are unhelpful stereotypes in society which feed into negative narratives around young people experiencing homelessness (YPEH). I hope that my research will help to challenge any unhelpful stereotypes.

The tour guide's personal story made me reflect upon the long-term impact of difficult relationships during childhood. Building positive relationships in childhood is certainly an area that we can influence as EPs.

Before conducting my research, I met an ex-support worker for PEH, who left their role due to burn out, lack of continued professional development (CPD), low pay, no supervision or team spirit. They felt like they were "going around in circles" because residents often missed support meetings and were not able or motivated to engage with psychological support. They mentioned a dilemma in that other residents were often not positive role models in relation to substance use and work-related attitudes. And yet, ex-residents kept returning to supported accommodation due to the sense of community and belonging. This prompted me to consider these issues in my research.

Hearing this support worker's experience first-hand was fascinating but also saddening because their passion for supporting vulnerable people was worn out by the challenges and complexities of the role, leaving them disheartened. I wondered whether this was a common experience for support workers. There is very limited research exploring support worker views, therefore this became a key aspect of the current research.

Before formally gathering data, I contacted a youth homelessness organisation and spent several months liaising with the strategic manager and team leaders. I attended meetings, a staff training event, and was shown around different projects to get a feel for how my research could be relevant in the context of this organisation, as well as in the context of current literature. In the very early stages (September 2018) I could see the relevance of an EP role within this organisation and was excited by this prospect. However, I was still slightly apprehensive about studying something too 'different' to previous educational psychology research and practice.

Over the following months, however, it became clear that the current research was highly relevant to educational psychology. Staff within the homelessness service told me that they were very keen for a psychologist to provide intervention and training related to mental health and engagement of YP. Part way through the research, I was delighted to hear that the youth homelessness organisation had opened two new positions for educational psychologists (EPs), for the first time.

I attended a training event for support workers to find out more about their role. At this event, an ex-resident presented her story of how she overcame homelessness. This was so inspiring to listen to, and yet these stories and voices are not captured in academic literature. This experience, alongside current research inspired me to take a positive psychology perspective, finding out what helps other YP to have positive outcomes.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Chapter Overview

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a narrative around the current research within the field of homelessness, and why youth homelessness should be of greater focus within educational psychology research and practice. I will begin by first defining what is meant by 'homelessness' and providing a context for the current research in terms of legislation, prevalence, and the causes of homelessness. I will highlight the enduring issue of homelessness, and why it is an important area for further research, not only in terms of supporting the individual, but also in terms of potentially impacting society as a whole. Due to the changing scope of the educational psychologist (EP) role, I will suggest why educational psychology research and practice needs to explore the skills, experience and psychological perspectives that EPs could use to support homeless young people (YP) moving forward.

### Search Strategies

When searching for relevant literature, I primarily used The University of Exeter search engine 'Encore'; which brought up journals from a range of sources including Taylor and Francis Online, EBSCO, ERIC, Wiley Online and PubMed in addition to the search engine Google Scholar.

The key search terms I used included:

- Homelessness OR youth homelessness
- AND
- England OR UK OR prevalence OR causes OR legislation OR educational psychology OR psychology OR positive outcomes OR exits

These key terms led to a selection of relevant primary papers. A number of secondary papers were accessed through a snowballing effect, such as through reference lists from primary papers, and reverse citation searches. Other

methods included seeking out unpublished doctoral theses through directly contacting researchers within the field, in addition to considering grey literature such as news articles and research by homelessness organisations and charities.

By using a narrative approach, I have been able to cast my net wide, drawing upon a range of relevant papers to create an overall picture (B. N. Green et al., 2006). I have highlighted a number of psychological theories that align with the emergent themes within the literature review. These theories are likely, therefore, to provide helpful frameworks to guide the current research.

### **Defining Homelessness**

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act (1977) was the first piece of legislation in England that placed a legal duty on local authorities to provide long term housing to certain groups of homeless people (Fitzpatrick & Pawson, 2016). The definition of homelessness in the UK is broad; when someone applies for social housing, local authorities draw upon the definition of homelessness in the Housing Act (1988). This definition highlights that there must be no accommodation available that the person could be 'reasonably expected' to occupy, or, if the person is living in a hospital or shelter because they have nowhere else reasonable available, and, are unable to provide accommodation with their own resources. In order to receive permanent social housing, the person must be categorised under the Housing Act (1996) as in 'priority need' *and* 'unintentionally homeless'. This means that whilst certain categories of people, such as families with children, are eligible for housing under this law, others are owed a lesser duty to be homed by the government (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2018). This legislation highlights that whilst social housing acts as a safety net for some people, the reality for others is that they may find themselves without any resources and support, in a rather hopeless situation whereby homelessness is very difficult to escape from.

### **Changes in Legislation**

The issue of some people being refused any support is leading to changes in legislation. Crisis (a homelessness prevention charity), for example, campaigned that there should be some form of support for people who get turned away from social housing through the 'no one turned away' campaign (Gousy et al., 2016). Similarly, the 'no second night out' initiative is targeted at supporting people to make a swift exit from rough sleeping (Homeless Link, 2014). In line with this preventative thinking, there have been some significant changes to legislation. The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) states that authorities must work to prevent homelessness through an assessment and personalised plan for all eligible applicants. This includes people who are imminently under threat of homelessness, irrespective of whether they are priority need or considered intentionally homeless. Furthermore, if prevention is not effective and the person becomes homeless, for a further 56 days the Local Authority (LA) has a duty to try to relieve homelessness. If these steps are ineffective, and the person is considered to be intentionally homeless and not in priority need, support may cease. Whilst this process certainly does not guarantee housing for everyone, I consider it to be a step in the right direction since more people can access support and early intervention.

In recent years, therefore, there has been a shift in thinking and legislation. Whilst the definition of homelessness has remained consistent over the years, recent policy has acknowledged the importance of widely accessible early intervention and preventative approaches. It could be argued, therefore, that current research around what helps YP to avoid or make a swift exit from homelessness is particularly topical and could further develop preventative policies and practice.

### **The Prevalence of Homelessness**

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act (1977) was brought about to decrease the prevalence of homelessness by providing a safety net. This remained effective in England for a number of years. In the late 1990s however, the prevalence of homelessness started to increase, due to factors such as fewer social lettings being available due to the long-term impact of 'Right to Buy',

combined with increased housing prices (Okamoto, 2007). This meant that there were increasing numbers of people in temporary accommodation, which came at a high cost to the government. In response to this, the 'housing options' strategy came into place, which provided support to prevent homelessness such as mediation with families to encourage YP to stay at home or avoid debt and eviction (Pawson, 2007). Aspects of this approach, such as family mediation, remain at the forefront of homelessness prevention services today (K. Schwan et al., 2018).

Identifying accurate numbers of homeless people in the UK today is difficult. For example, street counts only provide a snapshot of the numbers of rough sleepers on a particular night, and the duration of the person's rough sleeping is not known. Furthermore, some local authorities do not submit current data on local homelessness (Wilson & Barton, 2019). During 2018/19, in the UK, an estimated 110,000 YP approached their local authority because they were experiencing homelessness, or were at risk of homelessness (Williams-Fletcher & Wairumbi, 2020). This is only an estimate since not all LAs submitted data. Furthermore, this figure does not capture YP who avoid approaching formal systems of housing support, for example, due to fear of being labelled as homeless (McCloughlin, 2012). When I spoke to the tour guide during the 'unseen tours' trip, they explained that YP have to disclose childhood trauma and abuse to justify why they cannot return home, which, if they feel unable to do this, can act as another barrier to accessing formal support. This figure, therefore, does not capture all YP who sleep rough or sofa surf; only those who formally seek help.

Clarke (2016) highlighted a need for research into the numbers of YP sleeping rough. The author surveyed 2,011 YP aged 16-25 and found that 26% of respondents had experienced rough sleeping (for example in their car, a tent, on the streets) because they had nowhere else to go. The authors highlighted that the level of rough sleeping was higher than anticipated. Whilst these statistics are striking, it should be acknowledged that the research was funded by a homelessness prevention charity, therefore, the possibility of bias is a consideration. Nevertheless, the authors highlighted that the questionnaires

aimed to only capture 'real' rough sleepers as they only included YP who reported having 'nowhere else to go'. Despite this, they commented that some YP who reported having nowhere else to go, later contradicted themselves. This may suggest that some YP were confused as to the meaning of the questions, or perhaps made a mistake. The results, therefore, should be interpreted with caution, as with all self-report measures. Further research could use interviews to overcome this limitation, to allow the interviewer to gain a greater understanding and clarity around the YP's situation, by having the opportunity to ask follow-up questions if the YP provides conflicting information.

Although this research highlights concern around the number of rough sleepers, the findings could be positively re-framed, in that whilst many of the YP surveyed had previously slept rough, they were no longer doing so (Clarke, 2016). Further research that aims to understand what helped these YP overcome rough sleeping and secure a swift exit from homelessness is arguably more important than exact statistics. My research aimed to explore this further.

### **What Causes Homelessness**

The Homelessness Act (2002) led to a shift in focus from responding to homelessness once it happened, to exploring and responding to the causes of homelessness. The legislation placed a duty on Local Housing Authorities to conduct a review of the causes of homelessness in their area and use this as the basis for developing a homelessness strategy.

There is a range of literature that explores the causes of homelessness in and outside of the UK. Stablein and Clark (2019) highlight that the causes of homelessness differ across parts of the world. I will introduce some key literature around the causes of homelessness in the UK, and supplement this with international research.

Homeless Link (2018) highlighted that the leading cause of youth homelessness is family relationship breakdown. Parents may be less willing or able to provide

for their children due to poverty and financial pressures, for example, when there is overcrowding in the house, or when their child is not in employment and the family is no longer eligible for Child Benefit. Other risk factors include leaving care, mental and physical health difficulties at home, substance misuse, antisocial behaviour, and crime.

Most recently, Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2018), conducted a critical realist analysis of three large scale surveys around homelessness in the UK. Their motive for this research was to respond to well intentioned, but, in their words, 'misleading' messages from charities and government suggesting that homelessness is a result of random misfortune, and so, could happen to anyone. Whilst this message may be intended to encourage empathy and good will, the researchers questioned whether this notion is actually helpful, since if society sees homelessness as 'random', it may deter preventative and informed action from taking place.

The authors conclude that the likelihood of homelessness is linked to individual, social and structural variables, and is certainly not random. Based on a range of risk factors, such as childhood poverty, homelessness has a "*predictable* but far from *inevitable* nature" (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018, p.113). The preventative impact of relationships and social support was highlighted, for example, being able to stay in the family home as an adult child. Fortunately, some legislation around care leavers reflects this finding, for example, 'Staying Put' arrangements (Department for Education (DfE), Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), 2013), allow care leavers to remain with their foster carers beyond 18 years of age, if both parties consent. This notion of 'predictable but far from inevitable' left me wanting to know more about potential buffers, and how they can change people's predicted life trajectory.

Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018) provided a holistic and thorough exploration into the causes of homelessness by exploring both individual and systemic factors and how they interrelate. Whilst the researchers challenged the message that homelessness could 'happen to anyone', they did so in a reasonably sensitive

and non-blaming manner, emphasising that whilst homelessness is not random, the causes are often outside of the person's control. Due to the large-scale nature of the research, it does not explore people's perspectives and personal experiences. This could provide greater insight into what stops the predictable from becoming the inevitable.

Although Bramley and Fitzpatrick's (2018) research suggests that causes of homelessness can be both systemic and individual, in practice, intervention sometimes takes a specific approach. Padgett, Stanhope, Henwood and Stefancic (2011), for example, compare the 'treatment first' and 'housing first' approaches to reducing homelessness. The 'treatment first' model of support focuses on individual factors; homeless people are required to attend treatment programmes for issues such as substance misuse. Their access to permanent accommodation often relies on engagement and compliance with treatment programmes. In contrast, a 'housing first' model is being piloted in some LAs in England. This model argues that people firstly need permanent housing security, before being expected to engage with treatment interventions. This approach has an evidence base in America, however, is relatively new to the UK and requires a stronger evidence base before it can be widely implemented. Baxter, Tweed, Katikireddi and Thomson (2019) conducted the first UK meta-analysis on the impact of the housing first approach. They suggest that whilst it is effective in providing stable housing, reducing hospitalisation and involvement with emergency services, interestingly there appeared to be no short-term impact on mental health, quality of life or substance use.

Seager's (2015) research could provide a possible explanation for this. They describe traditional homeless services as being 'mind blind', in that services provide a house which meets physical needs, however, what people need is a *home*; somewhere they can feel a sense of belonging and social connectedness. Before rolling out a housing first approach, therefore, it could be argued that further research and consideration is needed into how housing can support mental health and quality of life. Another factor to consider is that the above meta-analysis included a range of ages, whereas some UK research on youth homelessness suggests that stable housing is a prerequisite to

education and employment, addressing substance misuse and allowing YP to 'cut ties' with peers who provide a negative influence (Mayock, O'Sullivan, et al., 2011).

Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2018) conducted a broad review into causal factors, however, other research has explored specific causes of homelessness. Herman, Susser, Struening and Link (1997), for example, focussed on childhood adversity. They compared survey results from 92 Americans who had previously been homeless with 395 adults who had never experienced homelessness. They retrospectively asked about their experiences of childhood trauma. They found that both a lack of care and physical abuse were risk factors for later homelessness. More recent research reinforces this association; Fitzpatrick, Bramley and Johnsen (2013) found that children who have experienced trauma are more likely to experience Multiple Exclusion Homelessness (MEH) as an adult. Furthermore, Weston (2015, p.1) describes how children who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma, and the homeless population "could be considered as two points along the same continuum or life trajectory". Martijn and Sharpe (2006), found that not only were YPEH in Australia likely to have experienced previous trauma, once they became homeless, they were more likely to receive drug and alcohol diagnoses and engage in criminal activity. This suggests that trauma and adversity act as risk factors for later homelessness, but that homelessness itself can then lead to further difficulties.

Childhood adversity is highly relevant to the EP role. Legislation highlights the need for limited EP time to prioritise the most vulnerable YP, including children in specific circumstances such as Looked After Children (LAC) or care leavers (DfE and Department of Health (DoH), 2014). Not only is childhood adversity associated with later homelessness; children with multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are likely to go on to experience a range of other negative life outcomes, such as mental health and physical health problems (Felitti et al., 1998). Current research highlights childhood adversity as a public health issue, due to the impact of ACEs on children's developing brain and biological systems (The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020). ACEs

are associated with greater psychological distress and lower subjective wellbeing in university students (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018) and higher rates of attempted suicide (Dube et al., 2001).

Of course, it would be not be reasonable to suggest that childhood adversity directly causes homelessness; as Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018) suggest, it is likely to be a complex interaction between a number of risk factors. For example, an American study found that a high proportion of care leavers experience childhood adversity before entering care, and some experience further adversity whilst in care (Salazar et al., 2011). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, leaving care has been highlighted as another risk factor for homelessness (Stein, 2006). Additionally, care leavers have been described as having an accelerated transition to adulthood. For example, Wade and Dixon (2006) found that in a sample of 106 care leavers in England, 75% had left their final care placement before turning 18. Current psychological research aims to support care leavers with this transition, by exploring their needs as they prepare for adulthood (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

Current legislation has recognised the need for care leavers to have a more graduated transition to adulthood and independent living, 'corporate parenting' aims to provide care leavers with the type of support that good parents would provide for their child (Dixon et al., 2015). This support includes a personal advisor for care leavers until they are 25, to support the YP with the needs set out in their individual pathway plan. This may include support to prevent homelessness (DfE and DoH, 2017). Furthermore, YP who are considered vulnerable as a result of being in care are classed as 'priority need', and so their LA has a duty to provide accommodation (Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, 2018).

The needs of care leavers being recognised in current research and policy is invaluable. It could be argued, however, that there are other vulnerable groups of YP whose needs are not widely acknowledged. Whilst legislation does highlight that 'violence or threats of violence' (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2018) can make a person vulnerable, it does not address

YP who have experienced family estrangement or relationship breakdown, and are thus forced to leave the family home. Family estrangement has been defined as “physical distancing and loss of affection between family members, often due to intense conflict or ongoing disagreement” (Agllias, 2011, p.1). It could be argued, therefore, that YP experiencing estrangement have an accelerated transition to adulthood. Whilst care leavers are able to remain with their foster carers beyond 18 years of age through Staying Put arrangements (DfE, DWP & HMRC, 2013), young adults experiencing estrangement may not have the option of remaining at home. In line with this, Simon (2007) found that compared to care leavers, YP experiencing family estrangement were more likely to become homeless due to less available support. This group of YP are under researched (Blake, 2017) and their needs not widely recognised.

In recognition of the financial difficulties that care leavers are likely to experience, some universities provide support through a care leavers’ service (Cotton et al., 2014). In addition to care leavers, estranged students are also likely to face financial difficulties. Bland (2018) explores the experiences of 564 estranged students in UK higher education, aged 18–25. These YP were not seen as vulnerable by their local authority. The author found that estrangement was associated with homelessness issues for students, particularly due to high student accommodation rates combined with the expectation for YP to return home during the summer months. From a psychological perspective, it would be interesting for further research to consider the emotional needs of this group of YP, since social support, such as friends and family relationships, help to buffer stressful situations, and reduce risk of drop out (Wilcox et al., 2005). Furthermore, Wilcox et al (2005) found that student living arrangements that encourage peer interactions are key in this process. For YP who experience estrangement, living arrangements amongst their peers may not be financially feasible.

Current research has highlighted the range of ways in which care leavers voices can be heard and used to enable service provision and policy to reflect their needs (Dixon, Ward & Blower, 2019). This includes methods such as participatory research and consultation with care leavers. Further research

could utilise these, or similar methods, to elicit the voices of YP who have experienced estrangement. As part of my research, I aimed to involve this under researched group, and attempted to shed some light on the perspectives of estranged YP who have experienced homelessness.

So far, I have outlined some potential causes of homelessness. It is important to highlight, however, that causes of homelessness can vary depending on the population; sometimes structural causes are highly influential and in other situations individual factors have a larger impact (Johnson et al., 2015). It has also been suggested that structural factors can have a greater or lesser impact depending on the country or location (Toro et al., 2007). My research, therefore, took a small-scale, localised approach and does not aim to be widely generalisable.

### **The Impact of Homelessness on the Person and Society**

A key motivator behind wanting to complete this research is to help YP to overcome homelessness. This may prevent a lifetime of homelessness and associated problems, such as substance misuse, institutional care and begging (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Homeless people, on average die at 47 years of age compared to 77 for the general UK population, often because of drug and alcohol misuse (Thomas, 2012). It is concerning that the estimated number of deaths among homeless people has increased by 51% between 2013-2018, with the steepest increase between 2017-2018. The increase in deaths due to drug poisoning is one explanation for this trend (Butt & Emyr, 2019). However, improved recording systems may also contribute to this increase.

Thomas (2012) found that homeless 25-34-year olds are four to five times more likely to die compared to 25-34-year olds living in houses. Suicide rates are also particularly high within the homeless population (Bonner & Luscombe, 2009). This emphasises the importance of early intervention, because if YP are supported to turn their lives around, this could not only improve their quality of life, but potentially save their life.

This research is not only important on an individual basis but also at a societal level. Preventing 'entrenched' homelessness by intervening early is more cost effective for the healthcare system. Research in Leicester, for example, found that PEH (defined as rough sleepers and people in hostels) attend A&E six times as often as people who are not homeless, are four times more likely to be admitted, and stay for double the length of time (Hewett & Halligan, 2010). More recent research highlights that this is becoming a greater issue; the numbers of visits to A&E by PEH in England significantly increased from 11 305 in 2010-11 to 31 924 in 2017-18 (Iacobucci, 2019). The increase in complexity of physical and mental health needs was also an area of concern.

### **Youth Homelessness and the Educational Psychologist Role**

The new Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) places an emphasis on multi agency working and states that all relevant professions have a legal duty to refer to the housing authority if they work with someone at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Changes in legislation (DfE & DoH, 2014) mean that EPs now work with YP up to the age of 25, who are no longer the responsibility of children's services or their parents. EPs must, therefore, remain vigilant around identifying YPEH or at risk of homelessness, and know how to respond.

This research is original because to the best of my knowledge, there is no published literature on the role of EPs in supporting YPEH in the UK. Since EPs now work with young adults, we need to think beyond promoting inclusion in schools, towards promoting inclusion in the community by preparing YP for adulthood (DfE & DoH, 2014). Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010) highlighted that since more EP services are adopting a traded model of service delivery, whereby schools and organisations can purchase EP time, this is a good opportunity for EPs to expand their role into the community. In order to expand the role, I believe we firstly need to raise awareness of and promote our skill set into educational settings but also community services.

It could be argued that the job title educational psychologist is restrictive, particularly within the traded world, since potential commissioners may perceive EPs as only working within education. Fallon et al (2010, p.4) provide a much more open definition than the job title might suggest:

EPs are fundamentally scientist-practitioners who utilise, for the benefit of children and young people (CYP), psychological skills, knowledge and understanding through the functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training, at organisational, group or individual level across educational, community and care settings, with a variety of role partners.

Indeed, Exeter graduates hold the extended title of educational, child and *community* psychologist. I aimed, therefore, to capture and promote the potential role and contribution of an EP within community services, specifically, homeless shelters.

The role of the EP in supporting homeless shelters is particularly relevant given the recent drive for homeless shelters to shift from being 'mind blind' (Seager, 2015) to becoming psychologically informed environments (PIEs) (Phipps, Seager, Murphy, & Barker, 2017; Williamson & Taylor, 2015). Some fundamental principles of PIEs include staff having an awareness and understanding of how to meet service users psychological needs, within an environment that enables reflective practice (Haigh et al., 2012).

I have highlighted the link between homelessness and early trauma and adversity, and therefore argue that given the knowledge of EPs around attachment theory, their experience of working with Looked After Children (LAC) and foster parents (Fallon et al., 2010), EPs would be well placed to provide a holistic, psychological understanding of a YP's current needs within the context of their childhood experiences. Furthermore, some EPs have experience of working in youth offending teams (Beal et al., 2017) and with care leavers (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019) which would provide further transferable knowledge and skills.

Many of the risk factors for youth homelessness, however, are areas in which EPs have a wealth of experience and could have a direct impact. For example, EPs regularly support other professionals to understand the needs of Children Looked After (CLA) through training (Bradbury, 2006; Lightfoot, 2013); consultation (Mann, 2012) and participation in multi-agency meetings (Bradbury, 2006; Norwich et al., 2010). Family relationship breakdown is another leading cause of youth homelessness (Homeless Link, 2018); EPs support positive parent-child relationships through interventions such as VIG (Video Interaction Guidance), aimed at encouraging attuned parent-child interactions (McKeating, 2018).

Whilst I have highlighted that there is certainly more to the EP role beyond the scope of education, from discussions with management at the Supported Accommodation (SA), EP knowledge about the education system is likely to be directly relevant. Recent literature has brought to light the notion of 'hidden disability' amongst homeless youth, suggesting that many YP experience cognitive, developmental or learning difficulties that may go unrecognised (Baker Collins et al., 2018). Anecdotally, staff at the SA have questioned why these needs often appear to have been missed during the YP's education. Exploring YP's experiences with education, and whether they had any prior support from EPs, may help to shed some light on this issue and trigger further thought around not only how EPs could support YPEH, but whether previous opportunities for earlier intervention had been missed. Furthermore, SA staff report a gap in the education system, whereby many of the YP at the SA want to access education and training but have difficulty accessing mainstream further education, due to psychological and academic barriers such as negative past experiences of education. The SA are, therefore, considering whether to set up training/education opportunities in house to make learning more accessible. This may be an avenue to explore further through the current research.

## **Underpinning Psychological Perspectives**

## ***Positive Psychology: Applying Solution Focused Thinking to Research***

There is a lack of research into successful pathways out of youth custody (Ackland, 2018) and similarly, what enables PEH to break the revolving door cycle (Hennessy, 2007). Furthermore, the literature around causes of homelessness does not paint a hopeful picture for children and YP experiencing adversity (Herman et al., 1997; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006). There is, however, a growing body of research into protective factors in the UK (Khambati, Mahedy, Heron, & Emond, 2018). Similar research in the US has highlighted environmental protective factors, including a safe neighbourhood and safe school (Moore & N. Ramirez, 2016). Cronley and Evans (2017) highlight that research should have a greater focus on coping and resilience among YPEH, as opposed to negative outcomes. Firstly, because this is an under researched area and secondly, because focussing on negative outcomes may, in fact, continue to marginalize YPEH.

My aim is to build upon the evidence base that sends out a more hopeful message, especially since my practice as a Trainee EP is driven by solution focussed approaches to problem solving (Stobie et al., 2005). Taking a solution focussed stance, therefore, provides a unique psychological perspective within this area of research.

Hennessy's (2007) thesis highlighted aspects of successful resettlement amongst PEH in Merseyside. These included client motivation, person centred approaches, practical support and emotional support that is delivered in an informal and flexible manner. There was a large sample size, comprised of participants between the ages of 16-74. My sample consisted of YP up to the age of 25, and therefore is more relevant to educational psychology, since I focused specifically on pathways out of *youth* homelessness. Mayock et al (2011) explored exits out of youth homelessness in Dublin. They found that factors such as supportive adult relationships, returning to employment or education, and breaking ties with previous street peers supported a successful exit. As previously mentioned, factors associated with homelessness can vary depending on the population (Johnson et al., 2015; Toro et al., 2007), therefore,

by conducting research with a specific organisation and EP service, the findings will be more relevant to service users, commissioners and EPs in this particular area.

### ***Ecological Systems Theory***

Although there is no EP research focussing on youth homelessness, there has been an interest in this area within community psychology and, more recently, clinical psychology (Timms & Taylor, 2015). Milburn (2016) highlighted the tendency for American community psychology research to focus on homelessness as an 'individual crisis' rather than 'structural crisis'. As discussed earlier, intervention focussed on treating individual factors such as substance abuse or mental health problems, until the 'housing first' movement began to look beyond individual factors.

In relation to educational psychology, this somewhat mirrors the shift away from 'within child' thinking. Historically, EPs took a 'within child perspective' since their role was to act as gatekeepers by assessing and identifying pupils suitable for mainstream education (Love, 2009). Following the Warnock report (1978) EP practice started to shift from 'within child', towards inclusive practice by adapting the learning environment of mainstream education to meet individual needs. EPs today are described as taking an eco-systemic perspective, considering how individual factors and systems around the child interact (Cameron, 2006). Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) therefore, remained central throughout the current research, to ensure that my research questions and methodology remained open to exploring both individual and contextual factors. The Bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) highlights the importance of proximal processes; the interaction between the individual and their environment. I reflected upon this when exploring the findings.

### ***Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs***

Maslow's Hierarchy (Maslow, 1943) is undoubtedly relevant when thinking about what YP need to realise and work towards self-actualisation. The shift towards a housing first model can be likened to Maslow's hierarchy, in the sense that it provides safety and security through stable housing, before attempting to meet higher level psychological needs, such as treatment for substance abuse or addictions. I am mindful of the limitations of Maslow's theory, such as complex human needs being represented in an oversimplified 'one directional' hierarchical structure.

A possible critique of the housing first model is that it only offers and does not require people to engage with psychological support. Service engagement and retention can be a challenge when working with PEH (Padgett et al., 2008). Maslow's theory does not explain why people can become stuck in patterns of unhelpful behaviour that prevent them from moving up the hierarchy. Other researchers have proposed, however, that living in poverty reduces a person's perceived sense of control, increasing impulsivity and affecting decision making, which may lead to behaviours that seemingly further entrench poverty (Sheehy-Skeffington, 2019). Maslow's hierarchy also does not explain why people may not engage with intervention that is designed to support their psychological needs, even once they have had their basic needs met.

### ***Motivational Theories***

Christian and Armitage (2002) used the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) to explore homeless people's engagement in outreach service programmes. They found that people's attitudes towards outreach services largely predicted their intention to engage, whilst their behavioural intentions and perceived behavioural control largely determined whether they participated in the programme. Interestingly, in contrast to other populations, they found that perceived social pressure significantly influenced their behaviour. They suggest that this may be due to homeless people being reliant on external support from services, and therefore more susceptible to external pressure or influence. This suggests that social pressure (a form of extrinsic motivation), in this particular study, influenced behavioural change.

Other theories focus on intrinsic motivation, and self-determined behavioural change. Self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) may provide a helpful framework for interpreting my findings. Whilst this theory looks at individual factors such as the extent to which a person feels competent, autonomous, and related, it acknowledges the role of systemic factors, such as supportive relationships, in enabling people to reach self-determination (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

Dennis, McCallion and Ferretti (2012) suggest that the principles of SDT are effective in promoting positive outcomes in the older homeless population in the US. There is no research, to my knowledge, that explores the utility of SDT in promoting positive outcomes in homeless youth in the UK, although it has been used with other populations of vulnerable YP. Hyde and Atkinson (2019), for example, used SDT to explore care leavers priorities in terms of preparation for adulthood. They found that relatedness was the key element in promoting positive change; consistent, genuine and personalised relationships supported service engagement and helped YP to pursue their post 16 goals. Hyde and Atkinson (2019) suggest that through the use of case studies, future research could explore the impact of EP support during the pathway planning process. In order to keep the YP's voice at the centre of EP practice (DfE & DoH, 2014) an important step before EP intervention, would be to explore YP's perspectives. This may include, for example, YP's views as to what additional support is needed during pathway planning, to enable positive outcomes. Since pathway planning is a statutory service only offered to care leavers, it would be interesting to explore what personalised assistance other groups of YPEH receive, in terms of preparing for adulthood. Hyde and Atkinson (2019) suggest that future research could explore the usefulness of SDT as a framework for exploring the needs of other groups of YP, in addition to care leavers. Following on from this, therefore, I drew upon SDT during my research with YPEH from a range of backgrounds.

### ***Attachment Theory***

Attachment theory proposes that when an attuned caregiver responds to a child's needs consistently, the child is likely to develop a secure attachment to their caregiver and see them as a safe base from which they can explore the world (Bowlby, 1988). A secure early attachment provides children with a positive internal working model (Bowlby, 1973), whereby they expect other adults to be trustworthy and attentive to their needs. I have previously highlighted that many YPEH have experienced family relationship breakdown, childhood adversity, and/or experience of the care system. When working with YPEH, it will be important to consider their early or past relationship experiences and how these may have shaped their understanding of the world today. A key aspect of PIEs is the importance of relationships; staff help YP to feel safe and emotionally contained (Woodcock & Gill, 2014).

Despite the significance of key relationships, there appears to be dearth of research into support workers perspectives. Lemieux-Cumberlege and Taylor (2019) recently found that homelessness support workers experience higher levels of depression and stress compared to other workers. Other research has highlighted high levels of staff turnover (Olivet et al., 2010). Support workers are likely to need their own support, in order to effectively provide emotional containment to service users (Toasland, 2007). Furthermore, high staff turnover is not conducive to consistent key adult relationships. Westaway (2016) recommends future research into the needs of staff who work with the homeless population. This was, therefore, an important issue to explore in the current research.

### **The Current Research**

Earlier, I discussed causes of homelessness and pathways into homelessness. The comparable lack of academic research around pathways out of youth homelessness continues to be acknowledged in current literature (Thulien et al., 2019). There appears to be a gap between research and practice; there is limited research into what helps YP to overcome homelessness and experience positive outcomes, and yet, legislation highlights the importance of EP practice remaining outcomes focussed (DfE & DoH, 2014). I have argued that youth

homelessness is highly relevant to the EP role, given their skill set and new remit in working with YP up to the ages of 25 (DfE & DoH, 2014).

Gaetz, Ward and Kimura (2019) highlight that in terms of positive outcomes, researchers need to look beyond housing alone and consider a range of factors including wellbeing, employment and social inclusion. To gain a holistic picture of a YP's current situation, I structured my interview questions around the four key areas of preparation for adulthood (DfE & DoH, 2014). That is: preparation for employment, community inclusion, independent living, and health. The purpose was to shed light, from YP's perspective, on what helped them to get to the stage that they are now, and what further support they might need. This structure directly informs the EP role in terms of thinking about post 16 Education and Health Care (EHC) Needs Assessments, since EPs are required to consider these key areas when writing statutory advice. I also planned to elicit support workers beliefs around what leads to positive outcomes in YP and compare this with YP's perspectives to form a richer picture. Furthermore, I explored YP's school experiences, to inform not only the current role of EPs, but also possible opportunities for earlier preventative intervention.

Current research has explored the views of care leavers in a number of ways. Dixon et al (2019) suggests that consultation has been used successfully as a method of ensuring that YP's expertise is used to inform future service provision and policy. I therefore used this approach with YP who have experienced homelessness. Furthermore, interviews allowed conflicting information to be clarified; a limitation previously critiqued in Clarke's (2016) study.

The lack of previous research into positive outcomes is one justification for the current focus. In addition to this, I wanted to focus on positive outcomes in order to empower YP, particularly since YP who have overcome homelessness often want to distance themselves from their old identities (Thulien et al., 2019). Given the skills and experience of EPs with regards to solution focussed thinking and questioning, this also brought a unique perspective to the interview approach. I have highlighted the dearth of research around estranged YP; therefore, I considered this group of YP during the recruitment process.

In summary, my research aimed to explore what YP and support workers perceive leads to positive outcomes, and how this can inform EP practice moving forward. It is important to note that due to the small scale, qualitative approach, this research will not be widely generalisable. I hope that this research, however, will provide a starting point for other EP services who are considering expanding their application of community psychology.

In the next chapter, I will outline the research methodology, including the research questions and the aims of the study.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, I firstly discuss the ontology and epistemology that underpins my methodological position. I will then outline my research design including the aims and research questions in both phases of my research, and how they interlink. Next, I will discuss the participants who took part in each stage of the research. I will then explain my reasons for choosing thematic analysis and outline the steps I followed. Lastly, I will briefly describe the ethical and practical considerations that were accounted for.

### **Methodological Position**

I chose to take an interpretivist approach because I was interested in understanding individuals' lived experiences, how they made sense of them and what they attributed to their progress and achievements.

Interpretive approaches to research reflect social constructionist epistemology. When there is little known about a specific subject or group of people, qualitative approaches are a good place to start. I chose an interpretivist approach because there is limited previous research that elicits the voice of YP who have experienced homelessness. Exploring what is important to them can act as a basis or springboard for further interpretivist or positivist research in this area. Finally, previous research around youth homelessness highlights that YP feel strongly that everyone's unique journey should be understood (Hines et al., 2015). An interpretative approach enabled me to hear YP's views and lived experiences.

From a social constructionist perspective, I am cautious not to suggest that one lifestyle is 'better' or 'correct'; this will vary depending on a person's constructs, beliefs, experiences, and worldview. I aimed to be reflexive throughout this project; despite the norms of the culture and society in which I live, I am not suggesting that everyone should aspire towards living in a house, having a full-time job and an active social life. However, as discussed in my literature review, what does motivate me is that homelessness is associated with what most

would consider objectively negative outcomes, including suicide, mental and physical health problems. In order to reflect on any biases or assumptions that feed into my personal construct of homelessness, asked interviewees how they personally define homelessness, and what it means to them.

Within social constructionism, individual meaning making is influenced by social interactions within a particular time and context. In line with a social constructionist perspective, Gergen and Gergen (1988) propose that narratives about oneself do not exist solely within the individual, but rather, they are influenced by social factors. Social constructionism was an appropriate stance for the current research because as a researcher, I played a part in co-constructing the meaning of interviews. For example, the questions I asked combined with participants views together shaped the outcome of the interviews, while the focus groups reflected the generation of knowledge due to interactive group discussion. Furthermore, my position in terms of my role as a TEP may have influenced the way in which I understand YP's school experiences. My attributes as a researcher as well as the context in which the interviews took place may have also shaped the responses of participants to some extent. This interactive process continued to be evident in the analysis phase; the researcher plays an active role in generating themes during reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This being said, I took steps to ensure that I reflected the authentic voices of participants as much as possible; for example, I transcribed and re-listened to all interviews, performed inductive (or data driven) thematic analysis and reflected back YP's stories to them.

I formulated the research questions based on the literature review, discussion with my supervisors and initial meetings with staff at SA to explore their views. I further refined the research questions following feedback from the pilot interviews.

I will now outline the order of this study. I chose to firstly conduct interviews with YP, then focus groups with SWs and finally, a focus group with EPs. I planned my study in this order because the YP's interviews provided the basis for the vignettes used in phase 2. Furthermore, I wanted YP's views to be at the

forefront of this paper, therefore, I discussed the YP’s findings first and in the most detail.

Table 1: *Research Design*

<b>Phase 1 (part a)</b>	<b>Phase 1 (part b)</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Aim</b></p> <p>To understand the perspectives of YP who previously experienced homelessness, and what enabled them to achieve positive outcomes.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Aim</b></p> <p>Understand the perspectives of support workers in a youth homelessness organisation.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Research Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do YP feel has helped them to achieve positive outcomes?</li> <li>- How do YP describe their school/educational experiences?</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Research Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do support workers feel leads to positive outcomes in YP?</li> <li>- What enables support workers to do the job well?</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Aim</b></p> <p>Using the vignettes from Phase 1a, explore how EPs could support YP at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Research Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflecting on the vignettes, and EPs’ relevant experience/skills, how could EPs support YP at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness?</li> <li>- What might be the barriers and facilitators for EPs to engage in this work?</li> </ul>	

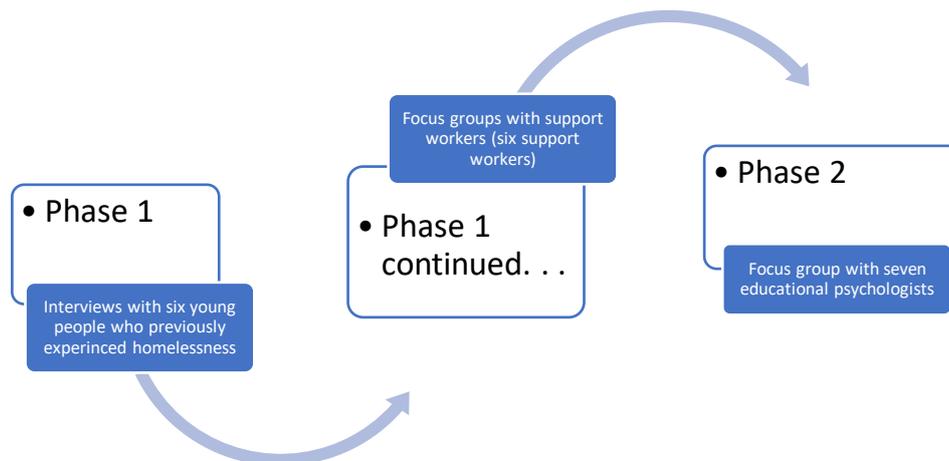


Figure 1: *Research Methods*

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## Participants

### ***Phase 1a: Young People Who Previously Experienced Homelessness***

#### Defining 'Positive Outcomes'

A key focus of the current research is understanding what enables YP to achieve positive outcomes. Positive outcomes, however, is a subjective term and therefore, I drew upon a framework, used in practice by EPs. The Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) framework was developed due to the SEND reforms (Preparing for Adulthood, 2013) and includes four key areas; education, employment or training, community involvement, health (mental and physical) and independent living (DfE & DoH, 2014, p.28).

In terms of recruiting YP who have achieved 'positive outcomes', one approach would have been to recruit YP who were experiencing success in all four areas of P4A (DfE, 2017). However, in addition to these areas being hard to define, I felt that this would be too restrictive when working with small and a potentially hard to reach population.

I therefore chose to focus on YP who had exited homelessness and were currently in education, employment or training (EET). This was for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted this research to take a positive psychology

perspective by reflecting on the stories of YP who had overcome homelessness, to shed some light on what we can learn from success stories. Secondly, focusing on YP who are in EET remains closely linked to the role of an EP, in that EPs now support YP aged 18-25 in educational settings or supported training programmes. Furthermore EET has been found to support successful exits from youth homelessness in Dublin (Mayock et al, 2011). Research has identified factors that increase a young person's likelihood of not entering EET for a long period of time, including permanent exclusion from school, attending alternative provision or a pupil referral unit (PRU), having social care involvement at child in need (CIN) level, and most significantly, being a child looked after (CLA) (DfE, 2018). I anticipated that some of the YP I interviewed will have experienced the above risk factors in addition to homelessness, and yet, they will be accessing EET.

I also chose to recruit YP who were living independently. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that one of the key differences between qualitative and quantitative research is that quantitative has a fixed method; it is harder to change the focus after starting data collection. However, qualitative research provides the flexibility to shift focus within the same study. This meant that I was able to be flexible with regards to my definition of independent living. Initially, I considered independent living as 'having your own place to stay'. One YP, however, had moved back into the family home, so this made me question what it means to be living independently. I adapted my inclusion criteria slightly when I reflected upon different aspects of independent living; it is possible to be independent in many ways whilst living with family.

In summary, the selection criteria consisted of:

- Between 16-25 years old
- Previously stayed in supported accommodation for young people experiencing homelessness (YPEH)
- Currently living independently
- Currently in education, employment or training (EET)

Following ethical approval (Appendix A), I interviewed six YP between the ages of 18-25 who had previously experienced homelessness (Figure 1). In order to protect YP's anonymity, due to the small number of participants it is not possible to report individual demographic information. I have therefore reported demographics in broad terms. By chance, the sample consisted of three males and three females. YP had previously stayed in supported accommodation for varying amounts of time. Two YP were in education and four YP were in employment around the time of interview. All YP became homeless due to a combination of complex factors which resulted in family relationship break down. As highlighted in my literature review, I was interested in speaking to YP who had experienced estrangement since this is an under researched area, although I did not make this a specific criterion. At the point of interview, some YP had no contact with family, known as family estrangement. Other YP were not necessarily estranged because they still had some contact with family members, however, their relationship remained strained. The majority did not receive emotional, financial or practical support from their family.

### ***Phase 1b: Support Workers***

I recruited six support workers (SWs) in total who worked within the youth homelessness organisation and ran two focus groups. I chose to recruit SWs because their views are underrepresented in the literature. They work closely, however, with YPEH so their perspectives were highly relevant to this research. Hollander (2004) proposes that when setting up a focus group, it is important to consider factors that may facilitate or discourage honest disclosure of opinions, for example, the potential impact of an authoritative figure being present. I therefore requested that management did not take part as I was mindful that their presence may influence responses of others in the group.

The SWs had a range of experience prior to their role, often in related roles. They had been working for the organisation for varying amounts of time. To ensure anonymity, specifics around time in service and previous roles have not been reported.

## ***Phase 2: Educational Psychologists***

I chose to recruit educational psychologists (EPs) because I was interested in exploring the potential role of EPs within youth homelessness organisations. As discussed in my literature review, I believe that EPs have relevant skills and knowledge to support children and YP at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Whilst there is previous literature around clinical psychology and homelessness, the potential, unique contribution of EPs is yet to be explored. As discussed in the literature review, I anticipate that EPs could bring I recruited seven EPs from the same local authority and facilitated a focus group at a team CPD day. I was keen to recruit EPs with a range of experiences and backgrounds to help generate varied discussion. Two participants were Trainee EPs, two were newly qualified, and three had been in the role for a number of years. Some EPs had experience that was closely related to youth homelessness, for example, one EP worked within a homelessness organisation, another worked within a youth offending team, and others had previous experience teaching post 16 students.

### **Method of Analysis: Thematic Analysis**

I followed the six phases of thematic analysis as outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 35). See Table 2, below, for an outline of the process.

I chose to use thematic analysis across both phase 1 and phase 2 for a number of reasons. Firstly, it has the potential to provide “a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.5). This is important because I wanted my analysis to capture the complex lives and journeys of YP. Thematic analysis enabled me to search across the data set for repeated patterns of meaning, helping me to understand the experiences and perspectives of interviewees. I hoped to understand their experiences as much as possible, for example, by listening back to the audio recordings, transcribing interviews myself, and by asking YP for feedback on their vignettes. However, I am aware that qualitative analysis remains interpretative and subjective by nature. Therefore, I will never fully understand the YP’s perspective. One young person captured this concept nicely during her interview:

Me: It's amazing to hear how far you've come

Young person: You have a different perspective on the situation to me, and have had different experiences, so, umm, I can't see what you see, you may see, like, a person slowly climbing up a mountain with a boulder on their back, but to me it's just what happens every day.

It is important that the YP's voices are key in promoting systemic change; and since thematic analysis can help to inform policy development, this method of analysis was suitable (Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### ***Using an Inductive Approach***

I considered whether to use an inductive or deductive approach to analysis. I initially planned to use a mix of inductive and deductive analysis, as there are benefits to both approaches. This has been described as a hybrid approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The deductive (top down) element enables a researcher to use guiding theory while the inductive (bottom up) element allows a researcher to remain flexible in order to hear interviewees' voices and priorities. However, I decided against the hybrid approach as I wanted to keep as much of an open mind as possible and listen to what the YP were saying without confining it within the parameters of a framework. Since having the young person's voice at the centre of this research was a key priority, I wanted the analysis to be driven by the data, as much as possible.

Although my approach was inductive by nature, I am aware that my original research questions and interests may have influenced my approach to analysis since they were salient thoughts in my mind. This is not necessarily a limitation since qualitative research recognises the role of subjectivity and emphasises the importance of the researcher remaining reflexive (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Whilst I analysed my data with my research questions in mind, I also remained open to themes that may not necessarily fit with the questions; I wanted to remain flexible to hear what was important to participants.

One potential limitation of TA is that it has "limited interpretative power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework that

anchors the analytic claims that are made” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.27). Therefore, in the discussion, I drew upon psychological theory to help make sense of the data and anchor analytic claims.

***Transcription***

Some researchers view transcription as a key phase of analysis within interpretative methodology (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Deeply engaging with the data is crucial when conducting reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Transcribing, listening to the audio recordings and analysing the interviews enabled me to continually reflect upon the data.

Throughout the analysis, I regularly went back to the audio recordings to remind myself of the tone and way in which the information was shared. This took me back to being in the room with the YP, bringing the transcript to life again. I believe that this helped my analysis to reflect what was important to the YP, both in what they said, but also the way they said it. Listening to the YP’s voice as much as possible was important to me, as these YP had few opportunities to be heard.

I followed phases of thematic analysis outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 35). The specific steps that I took are as follows:

Table 2: *Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in Relation to My Analysis.*

Stage of analysis	The process that I followed
1. Familiarisation of the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I transcribed the data myself. In line with guidance from Braun and Clarke (2013), transcripts captured all verbal utterances.</li> <li>• I re-read the transcripts.</li> <li>• I made a list of possible patterns within the data and noted what I found interesting.</li> </ul>
2. Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I uploaded transcripts into NVivo.</li> <li>• Using an inductive approach, I summarised sections of text from the dataset using semantic coding. Code</li> </ul>

	<p>names were specific so that from the codes I could generate broader subthemes and themes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I conducted complete coding, in that I coded everything that I thought was relevant to the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that providing a rich thematic description of the whole data set can be helpful when you are exploring an under-researched area. The views of YP, SWs and EPs on this topic are under researched, therefore this technique was used across the dataset. I reevaluated the relevance of each code once I had all of the codes together.</li> <li>• A potential critique of coding using NVivo is that context can be easily lost. I overcame this by copying larger chunks of data during coding, so that I could remember the context of the quote when I looked back through the themes and corresponding quotes.</li> <li>• In the focus group data, utterances showed me where there was strong consensus.</li> </ul>
3. Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before starting thematic analysis, I reflected upon what makes a good theme (Braun &amp; Clarke 2013. P. 231).</li> <li>• At the point of the initial analysis, I considered the themes to be provisional, or in Braun and Clarke's (2013) words, candidate themes. This is because I wanted them to remain open to refinement.</li> <li>• Braun and Clarke (2019) emphasise that themes do not emerge from the data, rather, the researcher plays an active role in sculpting the raw data into themes. The authors have recently revised the terminology "searching for themes" to "generating initial themes" to reflect this process.</li> <li>• When deciding upon what makes a theme, I considered how frequently it occurred across the dataset. I was mindful, however, that frequency does not necessarily determine the importance of the theme (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006). I considered the relevance to the research questions when prioritising and making sense of potential themes (Evans, 2017).</li> </ul>
4. Reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I checked whether the themes reflected the coded extracts and the entire data set.</li> <li>• I drafted out themes in diagrams to explore how they may interact to form an overall story.</li> </ul>
5. Defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wrote, rewrote and refined definitions of each theme to ensure that the essence of each theme could be captured in a clear, succinct summary.</li> </ul>
6. Producing the report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I presented the findings under the relevant research questions to ensure that there was a clear structure and link back to the focus.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I built upon my interpretation of the findings by drawing upon previous research and relevant psychological frameworks.</li> <li>• Braun and Clarke (2013) describe qualitative research as tending to seek patterns, but also exploring the difference and divergence within the data. Whilst there were some common viewpoints, each interviewees story and their meaning making was unique. Therefore, when reporting the analysis, I looked for common themes, but also made note of differences in opinion and particularly interesting or unique viewpoints.</li> </ul>
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I used thematic analysis for all data within this research project. For the YP interviews, I followed some additional steps during the familiarisation stage:

- I created summaries in the form of a vignette of each young person’s interview, structured around the research questions.
- I telephoned the YP to read through and discuss their vignette for two reasons. Firstly, as an ethical measure to double check that they were comfortable with details of their story being shared (although they were anonymous; I felt that this was necessary due to the personal nature of the vignettes). Secondly as a form of validation, to check that I had captured the essence of their story and represented what was important to them.
- Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss how an audio recording of an interview could be considered one step removed from the actual interview, and the written transcript could be considered two steps removed. I therefore made a note post interview of any interesting physical reactions or gestures, body posture and facial expressions and the general feel of the interview, before this information was lost.

Similarly, I made a note of these dynamics after the staff focus groups, for example, one participant sat slightly further away with a spare seat beside them, and I wondered if this physical space might have influenced how forthcoming they were with ideas. I gently directed some questions towards this participant, and they shared some valuable input.

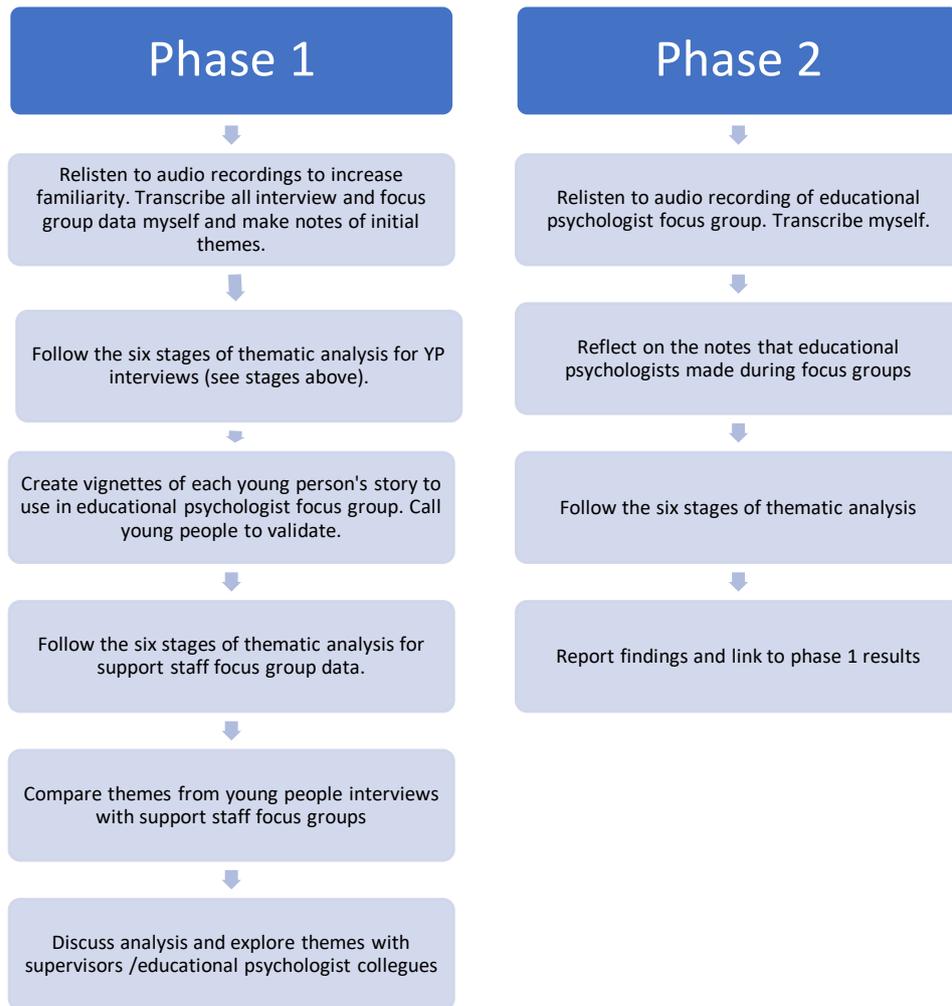


Figure 2: *Order of Analysis*

## Ethical and Practical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought and granted through the University of Exeter Ethics Committee (Appendix A). I have discussed ethical considerations in relation to recruitment of YP and SWs in Chapter 4, section 1. In addition to these:

- I informed YP that their data would be anonymised, and that I may use a pseudonym. I explained that a random member of the public reading the research would not be able to link their name to their responses. I explained, however, that staff who know them well and also know that they took part, may be able to work out, within the context, their responses.

- I decided not to present the full vignettes in this research to protect YP's identity; the cumulative effect of information could potentially make the YP identifiable to family members or friends if they were to come across this research paper. I ensured that I collected back all vignettes at the end of the EP focus group.
- I spoke with my supervisors about implications of participants reading the research at a later date, when their views might have changed. We considered how they might feel reading back sensitive issues such as their opinions about family members or childhood experiences. I have not, therefore, included quotes regarding specific sensitive information that YP told me about their backgrounds, such as details of abuse or sensitive and complex family dynamics. I was also mindful of this when selecting interview extracts for the appendix. I wanted to share the YP's voices as fully as possible, whilst being cautious around unlikely but possible implications of making specific quotes publicly available.
- I remained mindful of the principle of 'do no harm' when speaking to participants who have experienced trauma (McClain et al., 2007). I asked open questions and made it clear that YP did not have to talk about anything that did not wish to.
- At the end of each interview, I asked YP for feedback to ensure that I was putting the YP's needs at the centre of the process (Appendix B).

In the next chapter I will further explore the process and methods within phase 1, and then outline and discuss findings. My hope is for the YP's voices to be at the centre of this research. Exploring the YP's views in depth, and representing the findings using their words wherever possible, will therefore make up a significant part of the following chapters.

## Chapter 4: Phase 1

Phase 1 involved interviews with six young people (YP) and two focus groups with support workers (SWs).

### Methods

#### *Initial Stages of the Research*

In the early stages of the research process and prior to recruitment, I spent time gleaning background information about the youth homelessness organisation. I did this because I have not previously worked in a youth homelessness setting and felt that alongside the literature, real life current context would help to inform my research questions. Discussing my research proposal with the organisation before conducting the research enabled integration of literature with current/local issues. Furthermore, I felt that familiarising myself with the organisation and context would help me to anticipate any issues that may arise during data gathering and agree upon the best approach to recruitment.

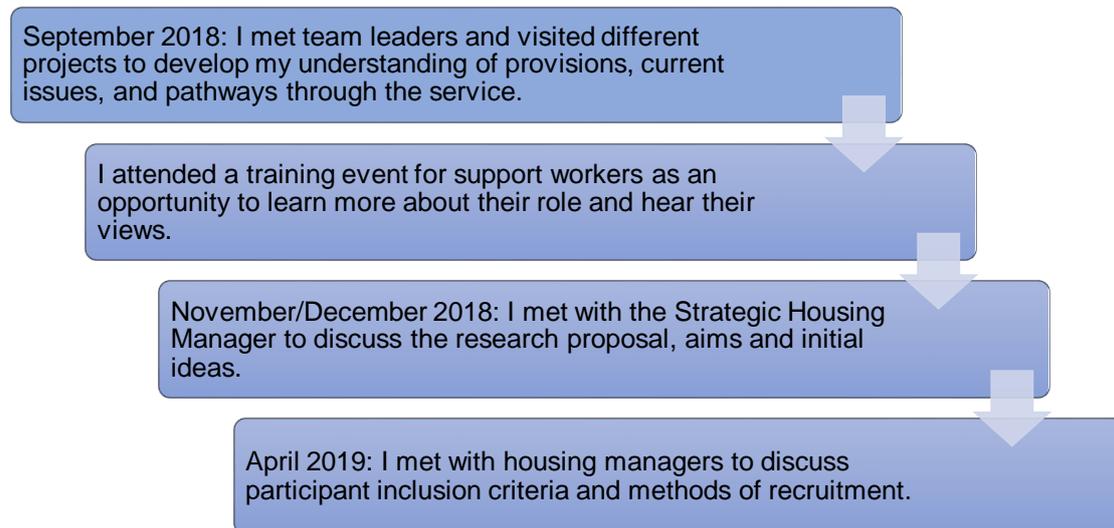


Figure 3: *Timeline of Events Pre-Data Collection*

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I first became involved with the youth homelessness organisation in September 2018 through contact with a team leader who showed me around the projects and invited me to a team training day. Through discussion with the training co-

ordinator, it became apparent that there were many training priorities that an EP could support with. I was excited about how an EP could potentially contribute to the service in the future.

I wanted to ensure that my research questions reflected not only the current research in the field, but also relevant issues to practice in this setting. I started with a research proposal informed by my literature review and built upon this by becoming familiar with the organisation, meeting with managers and gathering local background and contextual information before conducting interviews. This shaped my research in the following ways:

- SWs felt that many YP did not receive the support they needed during their education and have unidentified needs. They wondered why this is. I therefore ensured that I asked YP about their support experiences in school, to explore this observation further.
- Team leaders were interested in understanding why some YP do not follow a positive pathway out of the service. I therefore incorporated questions within the YP interviews around why some YP do not move on successfully. Due to the ethics and aims of the study (i.e. being based upon positive psychology), I did not interview YP who had not met the defined positive outcomes.

The interviews were structured in terms of three main areas: YP's first day in supported accommodation (SA), now, and the future (Appendix C). This enabled me to gain oversight of each young person's journey. I then asked exploratory questions about their progress over time, for example "you said you were feeling depressed on your first day in SA and now you are feeling positive . . . what do you think led to that change?"

When devising my semi structured interview schedule I aimed to avoid leading questions and keep questioning open to minimise the risk of biasing the participant's answers. Butt (2007) highlights:

There is an assumption that people can tell you what things mean to them, given time and encouragement. But this isn't what I've found. I think people need help in reaching for what things mean to them.

Butt suggested that laddering is one way of doing this. I often used the follow up question 'why is that important'. This helped to elicit what YP really thought, and sometimes allowed a participant to reflect deeper and change their initial answer. I therefore agree with Butt that laddering approaches are helpful if the participant has the verbal ability to expand upon their answers.

### ***Young People Interviews***

#### Recruitment of Young People.

At the beginning of this project, I was mindful that recruitment was likely to be a challenge, due to the niche and potentially hard to reach group of interviewees. I therefore carefully considered the best methods of recruitment beforehand and spoke to management at the SA to decide on the best way forward together. Staff explained that YP who have left SA might be hard to recruit for various reasons. For example, they are likely to be busy working, potentially apprehensive about the unknown, and still developing their organisational skills in terms of remembering to attend appointments. Therefore, I needed to make it as easy as possible for YP to take part, for example, by remaining flexible in



Figure 4: *Young People's Recruitment Process*

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terms of where and when we met. We also discussed how I could help YP to feel safe and welcome in what could be a novel or daunting situation. The manager suggested providing snacks, having an incentive, and allowing SWs to be present if the YP requested this.

Initially, staff suggested that I might have most success if I arrange to visit YP at their home. However, I felt that this could present challenges in relation to my safety as a lone researcher. I also wondered if YP might feel obliged to take part if they had agreed for me to visit them at home. I therefore decided that meeting at their nearest SA building would be ideal as it is a familiar location. It ensured that YP had the opportunity to not attend if they changed their mind on the day.

I was aware that it was likely to be the first time that YP had participated in research and that they may feel anxious. Therefore, it was agreed that a key member of staff would initially approach YP to explain the research and ask if they would be happy to speak to me. I provided an invitation explaining the study (Appendix D).

I initially gave out my work email address, however, soon realised that many YP do not use email as regularly as other methods of communication. I therefore agreed with the Exeter University ethics board and my EP service that I would use my work mobile number to contact YP instead. I had a much better response rate using texts and phone calls, perhaps because it was a less formal and more accessible means of communication.

I was mindful around possible ethical issues of offering financial incentives to YP who had experienced homelessness. I had a discussion with the SA management and my research supervisors around what would be an appropriate voucher value to offer. We agreed upon a £15 amazon voucher.

I attempted to speak to all YP over the phone in advance of the interview to build rapport, answer any questions, and arrange a time and place convenient for them to meet. I asked whether they would be comfortable meeting at a SA building, and if so, which one. I also asked whether there was anything I could do to make the interview a comfortable experience for them. For example, I asked if they had any dietary requirements and what their favourite snacks were, as the importance of food should not be underestimated when doing research with YP (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

Despite this, as expected I still had a couple of participants drop out on the day, and in these instances, I followed up with a text message to check that the YP was OK, and reassured them that if they wanted to rearrange the interview they could.

### Approach to Interviews with Young People

I chose to do interviews with YP rather than focus groups because I wanted all YP to have time and space to be heard. Since YP who have experienced homelessness are hard to reach, I wanted to make the most of the time that I had with each YP, by exploring their individual views and experiences in depth. Each interview lasted between 1-2 hours. This level of depth may not have been possible in a focus group where naturally there is less time for each voice to be heard. I was aware that discussing school experiences may be sensitive for some YP, and they may feel less comfortable talking about this in a group format. Sim & Waterfield (2019) note that it is also more difficult to retract sensitive statements said in front of a group. For practical reasons, I also felt that individual interviews would work best as I could be flexible in terms of fitting in with each young person's working pattern and preferred meeting place.

### Pilots with Young People

The first step in my research was to conduct pilots with YP to gauge their feelings about the drawing activity, questions, and interview process in general. Recruitment for the pilot phase was straightforward; I took the opportunity to meet with YP who were living in SA as current residents. I realised that recruiting YP who had moved on from SA would be more logistically challenging. However, since I was interested in understanding what helped YP to move on, it was important for me to speak to ex residents who had moved on successfully in the full interviews.

### How Pilots Informed the Development of Young People's Interviews

- YP emphasised the importance of being flexible and person centred. For example, one YP reported enjoying drawing and creativity, whereas the

other wanted a more structured approach by writing in a table. Therefore, I used a flexible approach, offering the YP options.

- One YP said that I listened well, and he could tell I was genuinely interested in his story. This was encouraging as I wanted the interview to be a positive experience. I ensured that I was confident with the order of questions so that I could display active listening skills without spending too much time checking the interview schedule.
- One YP said they would have liked more time to build rapport at the beginning. Therefore, I allowed time for this in the full interviews.
- One YP said it would be nice if I could summarise each interviewees strengths and progress at the end, to finish the interview on a positive note. I allowed time for this.
- YP suggested that the interview started with questions about the present, then moved onto their first day in SA and education, then ended on the future.

### Materials for Young People's Interviews

Please see appendices for the interview schedule (Appendix E) and examples of YP's drawings (Appendix C).

I incorporated a creative activity into the interview to help the interviewees feel comfortable. Directing attention onto the activity rather than verbal answers was helpful for YP experiencing language difficulties or anxiety. Most YP had a talent for drawing and took the opportunity to be creative. Other YP preferred a more traditional interview approach. I was mindful of individual differences and remained flexible in adapting the approach to support different strengths and interests.

I initially considered narrative approaches; however, I had quite focussed research questions, therefore, my interview schedule drew upon hierarchical focussing techniques to elicit YP's views in relation to specific topics (Tomlinson, 1989). I also wanted my research to be solution focussed, and I did

not want YP to feel like they were required to recount a detailed narrative of their childhood and any traumatic experiences. Rather, I wanted to explore specific elements of their past in relation to my research questions, such as their school experiences.

### **Support Worker Focus Groups**

#### Recruitment of Support Workers

I had a discussion with managers around the best way to recruit SWs. As an ethical consideration, I emphasised the voluntary nature of participation, as I did not want staff to feel obliged to take part because the focus groups were taking place during their working hours.

Management felt that for practical reasons, each focus group should be made up of staff from different areas so that the shift was covered by other members of their team. This splitting of teams worked well; staff who took part commented that it was valuable to hear how other teams work and share best practice. It was helpful from my perspective as it enabled a greater variation of views and experiences to be shared within focus groups.

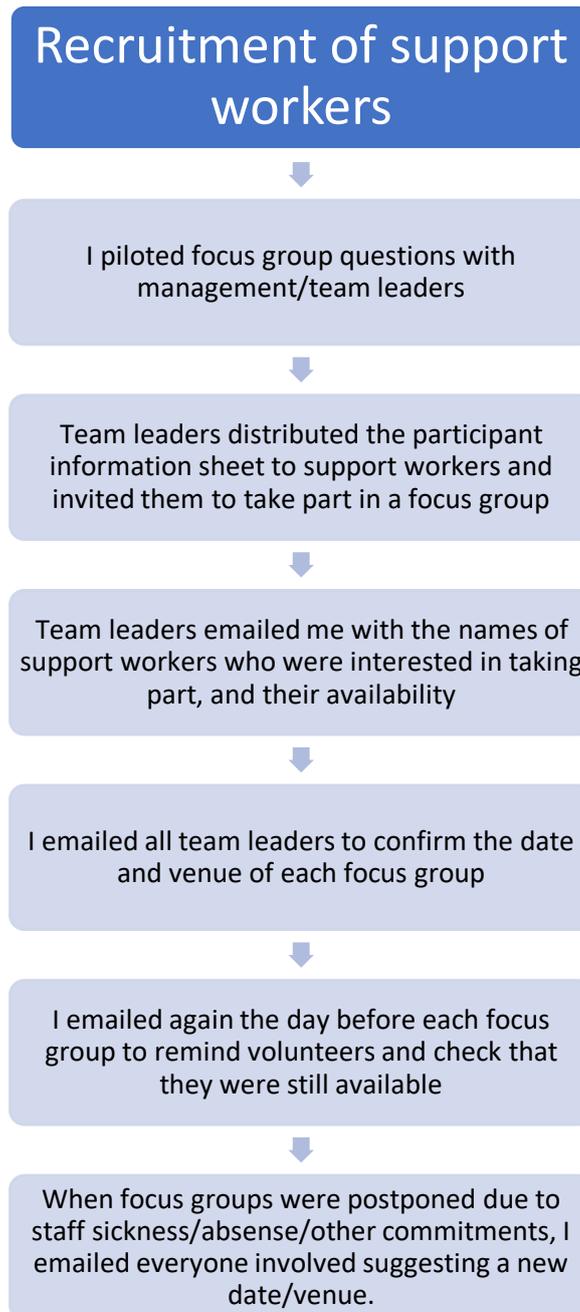


Figure 5: *Recruitment process for Support Workers*

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#### Approach to Focus Groups with Support Staff

The focus group data was gathered for two purposes. Firstly, as supplementary data to the YP's interviews in terms of exploring what leads to positive outcomes. Secondly, as a stand-alone exploration around what enables SWs to do their job well.

When I first began my research journey, I planned to do individual interviews with staff. After reflection, however, I felt that focus groups would enable me to

gather a wider range of perspectives. Focus groups were also appropriate since they can be a useful tool for exploring under researched areas (Frith, 2000). They are also ideal for demonstrating the views of underrepresented social groups (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Finally, I chose to use focus groups as the topics were not personal or sensitive, therefore a group format was appropriate.

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that smaller groups work best (between 3-8 participants) as they allow for rich discussion and are easier to manage. Morgan (1998) suggests that smaller groups are preferable when it is anticipated that participants will have a lot to say on the topic. Since I would be asking SWs about their job, and the YP who they work with on a day to day basis, I anticipated that they would have a lot to say, and thus, smaller groups would be preferable.

I had a discussion with SA team leaders around the practicalities of focus groups, and they felt that they would be feasible. I therefore adapted my initial interview schedule to fit a focus group approach, by drawing out key questions to use as prompts to elicit general discussion (Appendix F). I included more specific follow up questions to act as probes and prompts if needed.

A strength of focus groups is that they allow participants to take the lead, therefore I put the key questions on flash cards so that they could take turns in reading out the questions, to minimise my input. This enabled SWs to be the experts and build upon each other's knowledge and ideas. I brought food to each focus group as sharing food can set the tone and facilitate discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

When I began data gathering, I quickly realised that the logistics of having SWs at the same time in the same place was more of a challenge than we originally anticipated. Wilkinson (1999) highlights that one of the key challenges associated with focus groups when people agree to take part but are unable to be present on the day. I anticipated this and therefore overrecruited. Despite overrecruiting, the second focus group was postponed several times due to staff sickness, absence, emergencies such as police incidents, supporting YP with

medical needs such as doctor appointments and other responsibilities. This, in itself, told me a lot about the nature of the SW role, in terms of it being unpredictable and requiring flexibility.

Braun and Clarke (2013) talk about the importance of qualitative researchers being adaptable and responsive to change. They highlight the importance of planning for people not turning up and deciding, in advance, whether to go ahead with only a small group or individual interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.124). Due to originally designing an interview schedule and then adapting a version suitable for a focus group, I was equipped with the skills and resources to either facilitate a focus group or interview depending on who turned up on the day.

I facilitated two focus groups, the first with four participants and the second with two participants. Toner (2009) describes the latter as a very small focus group (VSFG). There is some ambiguity within the literature about the minimum number of participants required to class as a focus group, with some studies having a minimum of only two participants (Bryman, 2016). Toner (2009) suggests that VSFGs with as few as two participants can generate rich and broad data and that “to cancel a group because of small size, or to discard the data that emerge, would be an incredible loss of situated knowledge and an affront to the people who sought to participate” (Toner, 2009, p.190). Reflective of this, the second focus group generated a rich and detailed account with two participants. Each focus group lasted two hours.

#### Pilots with Support Workers

I piloted focus group questions with two members of SA management. At the beginning of this research, I had planned to include an additional research question around what further support YP may need after leaving supported accommodation. One of the main feedback points was that there was less to say on this topic. It was unlikely, therefore, that this topic would yield sufficient information to grant a research question of its own. The lack of answers was revealing in itself; perhaps it is a gap or a topic that needs further consideration.

I therefore incorporated this topic within the main interviews, but in less detail than originally planned.

## **Findings and Discussion: Phase 1**

Before presenting the findings of the thematic analysis, I will firstly set the context for this chapter by exploring the YP's perspective on what it means to be homeless. This has helped me to reflect upon and minimise my own biases or preconceptions and gain insight into homelessness from the participants perspectives.

I have replaced each participant's name with a number. I will refer to each young person as P1, P2, P3, and so on. Likewise, I will refer to each support worker as SW1, SW2, SW3, and so on.

### ***Defining Homelessness: Young People's Perspectives***

#### Homelessness is Complex, Emotive, and Subjective

YP's definitions suggest that the term 'homelessness' is complex and reflective of personal experiences and constructs (Appendix G). Experiencing homelessness, for these YP, is about vastly more than not having a roof over your head. The legislative definition, therefore, could be described as reductionist since it focuses on not having access to reasonable accommodation.

YP talked about psychological implications of homelessness, such as loneliness, feeling unfulfilled, judged, and misunderstood. Some YP talked about physical factors such as feeling cold, hungry and unsafe. The YP who had experienced street homelessness felt strongly that sofa surfing is not true homelessness, since basic physical needs are being met, and they have people to turn to in times of need. One young person felt homeless whilst in hospital, because although they had the hospital roof over their head, they had limited social support and did not know where they would stay next. Other YP, however, felt that sleeping outdoors does not necessarily equate to homelessness, because you might consider a cardboard box or a tent to be your home.

Interestingly, one young person felt more isolated when they moved into a house for the first time.

I was very very depressed (when I was living in a house) because I was used to travelling and being out in the open, I had things to do and friends . . . when I moved into the new environment of 'house' we just stayed there, I didn't meet anybody because of the differences that we had I just couldn't connect the only thing I could do that made me happy was watching TV endlessly – I could stay awake for days!

This young person spent their childhood travelling, staying in tents, on sofas, and in vans. Moving into a house for the first time, as a teenager, was an isolating and depressing experience. Living in a house meant that they no longer experienced social connectedness. Social connectedness and self-esteem have been linked to wellbeing in YPEH (Dang, 2014).

These responses emphasise that YP consider homelessness partly as a housing issue, particularly during the cold winter months, but more so a social issue. Homelessness means having no one to go to for help, being lonely, unsure about the future, and socially isolated or outcast, often irrespective of living arrangements.

This means that any 'housing' intervention *must* consider YP's underlying need for strong social networks and community links. Simply providing a YP with a house, without consideration of social and emotional factors, can be detrimental for some YP. This reflects Seager's (2015) theory that traditional homeless services are 'mind blind', in that they provide a house which meets physical needs, however, what people need is a *home*; somewhere they can feel a sense of belonging and social connectedness.

Listening back to the audio recordings, the definition of homelessness was an emotive topic for most YP, around which they held strong opinions.

Professionals need to remain sensitive around the use of the term 'homeless', when referring to a YP's status, as it is a sensitive and subjective word; a young person may or may not prefer to identify with it (Hoolachan, 2020).

### Homelessness Feels Unpredictable

In the literature review, I discussed how based on a range of risk factors, homelessness could be described as having a “predictable but far from inevitable nature” (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018, p.113). Interestingly, however, the YP I interviewed felt that there was an element of unpredictability around becoming homeless.

P█: I do always live in fear . . . cos one day I was living there (with a relative) honestly my life couldn't have been any better. . . the next day I was homeless, and I was like how? So, I do live in fear that one day life is amazing and then tomorrow it's all gonna be gone. Where I've seen it first-hand . . . people say no it's not gonna happen that quickly if you pay your bills and stuff but it's not true, it can literally happen within 24 hours.

P6: when you are at the best point of your life it's never too late it could all go tits up and you end up going on a path of self-destruction and destroy yourself, but it's also never too late that if you are down in the bottom of the slumps, it's never too late to spin that around and be better than you've ever been in your life.

Becoming homeless due to family relationship breakdown was unexpected. For some of the YP, this uncertainty caused long lasting anxiety that at any moment their security and safety could be removed, and their lives returned to their lowest moments. Homelessness is recognised to be a traumatic experience (Deck & Platt, 2015; Goodman et al., 1991). For P█ and P6 the trauma had lasting psychological impacts after the issue of housing had been resolved.

Since the leading cause of youth homelessness is family relationship breakdown (Homeless Link, 2018), it is particularly important that the psychological impact that this has on YP is understood and supported. YP who have experienced significant unsettlement in terms of housing in the past, may feel particularly anxious that they will experience this again.

I have introduced this chapter by firstly establishing what homelessness means to YP. With this in mind, I will now present the overall findings and discussion under each research question, to aid clarity and structure.

### ***Research Question 1: What do YP Feel has Enabled Them to Achieve Positive Outcomes?***

I will now present and discuss the themes from across YP interviews. All six interviews were unique, this was demonstrated through the originality of each vignette. However, thematic analysis highlighted common themes, which I will explore in depth throughout this chapter. I selected themes based on frequency and/or relevance to the research question (Figure 6: Research Question 1: What do Young People feel has enabled them to achieve positive outcomes? (Appendix H and I).

#### Positive Outcomes as a Subjective Term

This theme highlights that positive outcomes is a subjective term. A key positive outcome for most YP was getting their own place; it brought a sense of independence. “I like having my place, its mine and if I don’t want somebody there, they can just go, and I can put whatever I want there” (P1). “My positive outcome was I got gold banded. . . I am genuinely extremely proud of my 2-bedroom house. My key achievements are my children, my girlfriend, my home, how beautiful my home is” (P2).

Some YP were proud to be working because it meant that they could pay their own bills; “I wouldn’t want it any other way” (P3).

Other YP considered positive outcomes in terms of their health and social life

P4: I got a much healthier social life now, definitely much more independent now, I’m healthier now, doing well in my course, managed

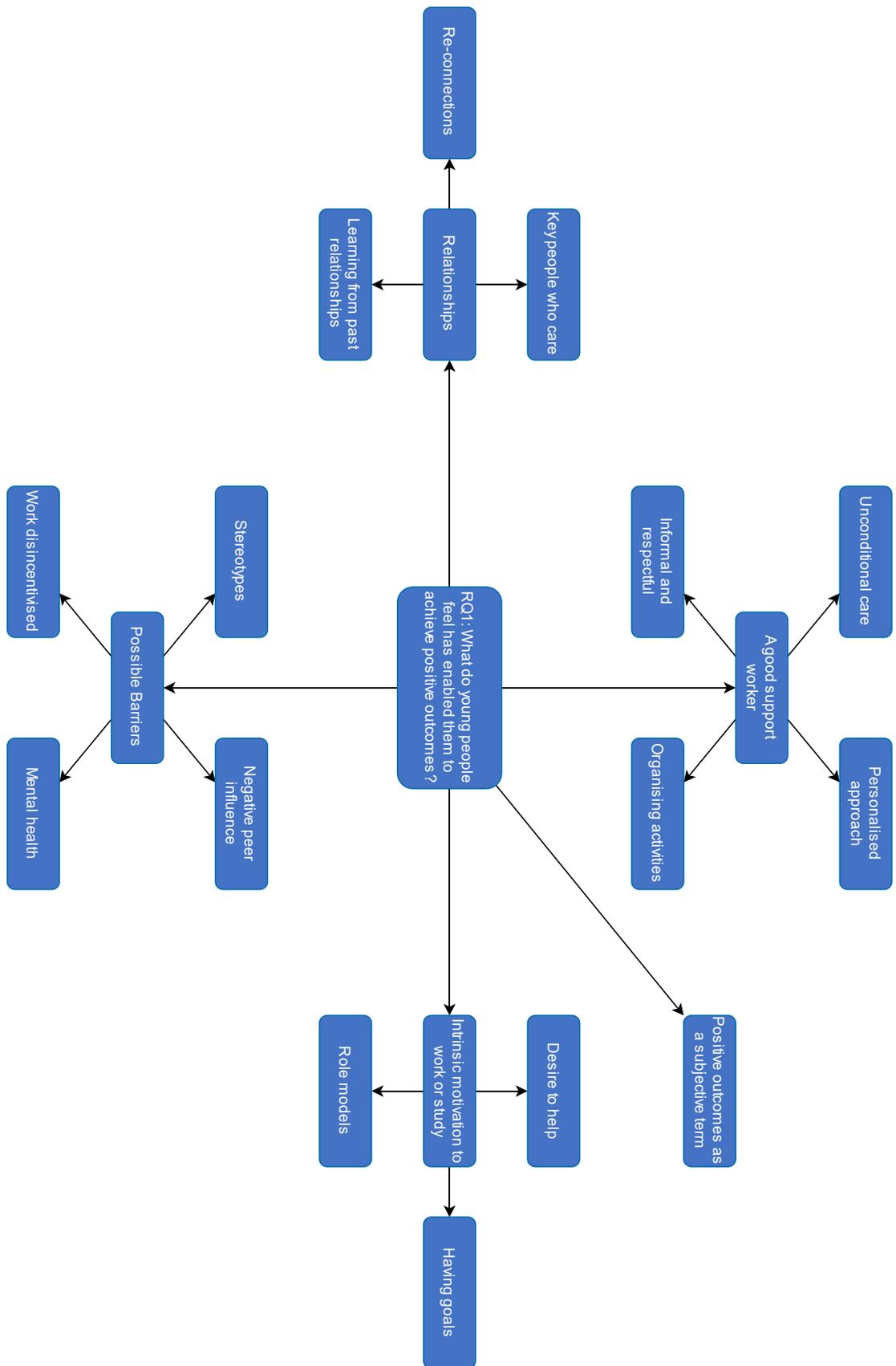


Figure 6: Research Question 1: What do Young People feel has enabled them to achieve positive outcomes?

to pass my first year. I'm probably in a better position now in my life than I've ever have been.

P4 referred to positive outcomes in terms of her wellbeing and having a sense of hope "I have aspirations in life and that's the most important thing, that I actually look forward to living".

The definition of positive outcomes, therefore, is hugely broad and personal. The YP's responses, however, do generally fall under the four key areas of P4A (DfE & DoH, 2014). The YP placed a greater focus on mental health than is alluded to in the P4A framework. This should be an area for consideration if the framework is reviewed. I will now present the key themes that summarise what YP feel enabled them to achieve positive outcomes.

### Relationships

This theme explores the impact of relationships on positive outcomes. In my literature review I highlighted that attachment theory (Bowlby, 1997) is likely to be highly relevant to my findings, in that YP who become homeless have often experienced relationship breakdowns and childhood adversity (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Herman et al., 1997; Homeless Link, 2014; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006; Weston, 2015). All YP in the current study described adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and relationship breakdown with family members and/or school staff. In line with a positive psychological perspective, however, I have focussed on how despite these difficulties, key relationships have also supported YP on their journey. I will focus on the impact of parents, reconnections and key people who care.

### Learning from Parents

I did not explicitly ask interviewees about their childhood and home life, because I wanted the interviews to be focussed on exploring what helps and what has gone well in YP's lives. Despite this, it became apparent through listening to the YP's stories that they all had complex family dynamics, and most had experienced trauma, separation and loss. Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018) highlight that being able to stay in the family home as an adult child is a protective factor against homelessness. It is unsurprising, therefore, that most

YP in the current study experienced relationship breakdowns or estrangement from their family. Despite this, YP commented upon what they had learned from parents, and how this shaped them into the person they are today.

P█ talked about her mother's influence.

P█: I still really like environmental stuff, I've managed to gather the best bits of my mum's random life, she likes eco stuff and so do I . . .

P█ commented upon how he loves art. He was not in contact with his parents due to relationship breakdown, but despite this, he described memories of his parent's creativity with enthusiasm.

It was apparent that parents influenced YP's work-related interests, and their core values around the importance of work. I have discussed this further under the theme 'intrinsic motivation to work or study'.

I have just given some examples of how YP were influenced by parents' strengths and interests. However, YP also reflected on what they had learned from parents' difficulties.

P█: (as a child) I had to make decisions that my mum should have been able to make. . . she would buy things that she didn't need. These situations could have been preventable, and now I have foresight of these things because of the mistakes she made.

P█ felt that problem solving and finding solutions is now one of her strengths because she had to "be the grown-up" and make important decisions as a child.

Witnessing the effects of substance abuse helped one YP to recognise that they were following the same path as their parents. This motivated them to break free from drug addiction.

I realised I was going down the same path, my mum had the same childhood, upbringing to me she was in a hostel, she did drugs and then she died. I looked and thought it's the same pattern really, so I just wanted to stop it there.

Witnessing parent's difficulties appeared to motivate YP to follow a different path. Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1943) specifies that when people do not

have their basic physical or psychological needs met, they will not be able to move up the ladder to self-actualisation. Interestingly, for these YP, reflecting on adversity and unmet basic needs as a child appeared to motivate them to become their 'best self' as an adult.

In summary, this subtheme demonstrates that YP reflected on what they learnt from their parents and how it built their resilience and skills. YP in the current study were willing to initiate conversation about their childhood "talking about it helps" (P█). This reflects findings by Ovenstad, Ormhaug, Shirk and Jensen (2020) that talking about childhood adversity can support trusting relationships when met with validation and acceptance. Helping YP to make sense of their background can also foster a sense of belonging, which is a key element of resilience (Hart et al., 2007). It is important, therefore, that YPEH have opportunities to talk about their past, if they wish to, and discuss learning or personal development as a result.

### Reconnections

YP talked about the positive impact of reconnecting with key people from their past. This included peers, family and occasionally key professionals.

#### Reconnecting with peers

P█ previously wanted to connect with friends however did not have the literacy skills to connect via social media. English tuition at college gave her the skills she needed to reconnect "I've gotten back in contact with them now I can read a bit."

P█ explained that, with the help of his parents, disconnecting from peers who were using drugs and then reconnecting with "sensible" old school friends helped him to stay clean.

P█: I didn't properly go out (socially) until I was clean, and by that point, I was finding new friends, sensible friends only (laughs) on Friday and Saturday drinking friends.

Me: How did you find them?

P█: They were old friends of mine from primary and secondary school and college, I'd just lost contact with all of them, it was more because I was into drugs, they weren't into it so obviously I had to find new friends to do it with. So kind of just separated, then they found out I was clean and that, just drunk, so we started hanging out it was quite scary for the start of it just cos you know everyone changes a lot, I didn't know if they were sensible and that but they're alright.

P█ went on to talk about how he has a "healthier social life now", including sports and hobbies with friends. It is interesting that P█'s old friends initiated the contact once they heard that he was no longer taking drugs. Social identity theory proposes that people are more likely to conform to the behaviours of their in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Peer influence is a key driving factor in relation to substance use in adolescence (Caouette & Feldstein Ewing, 2017; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2018). Alternatively, as reflected by P█'s experience, YP may change their ingroup if their behaviours and attitudes regarding substance use are different to their own (Kandel, 1985). Therefore, being surrounded by peers who are not involved in substance use is likely to have had a positive influence on P█'s recovery. This also demonstrates the importance of peers reaching out to old friends who they know have been struggling, because it can be "quite scary" reconnecting with them.

P█ explained that moving back to the area where she grew up was the "best thing I've ever done" because it enabled key people to re-connect with her.

P█: ...as soon as I moved here X texted me (now boyfriend) it's a funny story, when I was like 14 he was a year or two above me and he kept messaging me asking to meet . . . I'd never turn up. When I moved back, he kept doing the same. So, this time I was like well I'm older now, I've got nothing to lose . . . And we spent that night together and we have spent every night together since . . .

Again, this highlights that reconnecting with key people from the past can have a positive impact on YP.

### *Reconnecting with Family*

P█ was able to reconnect with her father. This brought a sense of happiness.

P█: Like it is weird but it's not cos it's like we've never been apart. But now like he's here he'll text and ring me every day . . . I went a bit mad on him for Father's Day cos it was the first one in so many years, he kept pulling these presents out of a bag he was like ah its only Father's Day!

P█ had a positive relationship with her grandparents, but as a child she did not have the opportunity to see them regularly. She was pleased to have more autonomy as an adult, so that she could be in more regular contact with them and ask them for support when needed.

Reconnecting with family and friends helped re-build a positive support network for YP. Often, these people had a positive influence on YP in the past, but for various reasons, they had lost contact. Some YP, however, commented that they did not wish to reconnect with family; the process of reconnecting can be very complex and bring about conflicting feelings (Mayock, Corr, et al., 2011). Space and time away from family members had improved relationships for some YP. SA can provide this time and space, alongside family mediation when both parties are ready, to help restore relationships and reconnect family in a gradual and supported manner.

#### Reconnecting with professionals

P█ wanted to reconnect with professionals who she previously had a positive relationship with, however, she was unable to contact them directly.

P█: It is frustrating cos I've lost their numbers, both her (adolescent support worker) and the social workers said I could keep in contact but I have lost their numbers so I can't get hold of them. And my leaving care worker can pass the message onto them and they can get hold of me but obviously my leaving care worker isn't allowed to give me their numbers, so that's frustrating.

P█ was particularly keen to reconnect with her adolescent support worker because she was a support figure during times of adversity.

P█: she was amazing I got on with her like amazing like you wouldn't even believe this but you are only supposed to have them for eight weeks, maximum 12, yeh I managed to keep mine for a year and a half! Because every time she left – they are like the crisis team – I would make something happen so that she came back. And in the end, her

boss said well I'm sick of her making crisis so just stay with her until she finishes college! . . . Honestly like it was the best thing ever but when I finished college, I knew that was genuinely it, and it was quite sad.

Rhodes and DuBois (2008) suggest that a genuine connection is central to the success of youth mentoring programmes. This was evident from P█'s experience "I got on with her like amazing". Relationship continuity was extremely important for P█. The negative impacts of early termination of youth mentoring relationships has been documented (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2009). Therefore, if a young person is developing a secure relationship with a key adult and is not ready for the relationship to end, this should be protected wherever possible. It may also be helpful to consider whether opportunities can be created for YP, like P█ to reconnect with key professionals after their case is closed.

Some ex-residents highly value being able to reconnect with support staff in SA.

P█: Their smile when I came around the corner - it's an amazing experience to be able to move out of something like this and come back and just be so welcomed . . . I see Fiona (support worker) out and about all the time, she will stop and say, "how's your children, it's so good to see you!" It's rewarding to know that I've got people like that who genuinely know me, let alone care for me.

For YP who feel unable to reconnect with family members and friends, SWs may continue to be key figures in their support network. Enabling these YP to build new support networks within their community will also help to promote positive outcomes (Laser & Leibowitz, 2009).

### Key People Who Care

Most YP arrived at SA because they did not have a strong support network, or because their support network had temporarily or permanently broken down. Despite this, some YP referred to key people who provided either practical or emotional support when they became homeless. P█'s relative was a key support figure.

P█: my (relative) has been an angel sat on my shoulder constantly helping me out, she's got so many problems of her own but she sits there

with a smile on her face making sure I'm happy and honestly, family members like that keep you motivated . . . she pushed me into (Supported Accommodation), got me through, she came down with food parcels she made herself cos she knew I didn't like the food parcels they gave us.

For P█, it was her friends who showed that they care.

P█: I've got three friends in my life that mean the world to me, they never left my side when I was homeless, one of them put me up. When I first moved in here, never gave up on me, their mum was buying me food . . . they always said you are gonna be someone, you are gonna do something with your life. They inspired me. But I stopped hanging round with them because I felt like I was bringing them down, like they don't want to hang around with me whilst I am fucking up my life, so I thought go and chill with the people who don't care if you fuck up your life. And that was the mistake I made; I didn't choose the ones who cared for me . . .

YP felt that when they were struggling with drug use, even the people who cared most were unable to support them “they (friends) didn't try and stop me” (P4). There was a sense that support sometimes only resumed when YP were in a better place “They (friends) got in touch with me when they knew I was clean” (P█). Furthermore, some YP may distance themselves from their support network if they feel like they are “bringing them down”. This highlights the challenges of supporting a young person at risk of homelessness, particularly if they are engaging in substance misuse. It may feel like they are pushing key support figures away (Hawkins & Abrams, 2007). This highlights that there needs to be a high level of support and advice available for the “key people who care” whether that be friends, family, or other key people (Wang et al., 2019).

Interestingly, having people who *they* cared about, motivated some YP to make a change. For P█, the responsibility of being a father motivated him to find a job.

In summary, Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018) highlight that relationships and social support help to prevent homelessness. Further to this finding, the above themes suggest that social support and relationships help YP to exit homelessness. Even where there is relationship breakdown, learning from past relationships can help YP to move forwards. Reconnecting with positive

influences from the past and accessing social support from people who care has helped these YP to exit homelessness.

### A Good Support Worker

Most of the YP described how their SW had a profound impact on their lives and played a key role in their success.

P2: There was a lot of support here, and to be honest if it weren't for someone that worked here I wouldn't be where I am today it might sound like I'm exaggerating but I'm really not, Becky (support worker) is an absolute gem.

P4: I have aspirations in life and that's the most important thing is that I actually look forward to living . . . And it was all down to Becky to be fair. . . I have the biggest soft spot for Becky she is my favourite person ever. .

Most YP had experienced early attachment difficulties, trauma and relationship difficulties at school and home. These experiences can make it more difficult for YP to build trusting relationships (Bistricky et al., 2017). Despite this, the SWs were able to build meaningful connections with these YP. I therefore followed up by exploring, in depth, how exactly their SW built a meaningful relationship with them and made a positive difference. The key elements of a good SW fall under the following subthemes.

### A Personalised Approach

To prepare for moving out of SA, YP are supported to complete an independent living skills programme. P5 said that his SW provided a high level of support to help him to complete the paperwork due to attention and literacy difficulties. P5 needed regular prompting and encouragement. In contrast, P6 needed staff to trust that he would, in his own time, complete paperwork independently. On the other hand, P█ explained that she was not even required to complete the programme fully, because she already had the required skills to move on.

P█: They didn't make me follow the whole protocol like the file and paperwork you're supposed to do, like that massive moving on folder, I literally just scribbled on a few pages and they signed it off. Where I'd been in a flat before I found it more frustrating, cos I went from having my

own flat, to living with family, to living at supported living so I felt like I was going backwards . . . And in staffs' eyes I didn't actually need it, I used to get frustrated on other people's behalf because there were other people on that waiting list that needed their support . . .

This suggests that staff are assessing YP's needs and providing the appropriate level of support to successfully move on. Cronley & Evans (2017) highlight that this is essential in order to target support and resources towards YP who are most vulnerable.

Flexibility ensured that rules were person centred and psychologically informed. YP gave examples of where staff waived the rules when it was in the YP's best interest. For example, to help maintain P's basic psychological need for feelings of safety (Maslow, 1943), her SW took a person-centred approach in a complex situation.

P: . . . he was the person that I felt alright with around, so I felt that she (support worker) took that into account and was like he's going to be banned (from visiting) for a certain amount of time so I was safe but it wasn't going to be permanent because it would affect my mental health and I think things like that are really important, like she understands me.

Fostering feelings of safety was a psychologically informed approach. It also helped P to feel understood. P described having a "bond" with her SW, because she was attuned to her needs "it's like it's instinct for her to know what to do and how to make someone feel good". Feeling understood is key for building trusting relationships (Lewicki et al., 2006). Having key trusted adults is highly important for PEH and affects outcomes (Thoburn, 2016).

Similarly, P felt that his SW had a genuine understanding of addiction and depression, and that this understanding meant that she was able to provide personalised support "Becky (support worker) knows what it's like, not personally but I know she knows a load of people what's like it, she knows that the best thing is to support them through it". This demonstrates that SWs need to understand residents as individuals as well as understanding the nature of their mental health or addiction difficulties in order to provide personalised support.

P5 believed that some YP do not respond well to scheduled meetings because they feel a sense of “entanglement, like you are tied in”. He explained how his SW and job centre coach both had a personalised and flexible approach.

P5: she (job centre coach) understands my anxiety more than I do . . . sometimes if you are late to a meeting, they will bollock you . . . I don't do well with bollockings at all. . . she basically started making me aware that even if I was having an anxiety attack, I just need to tell her, even if I'm late for my meeting and she phones like “where you to”, “I can't come in” Why” “Anxiety is going off” “OK” . . . and she'll rebook immediately. That's care. That's the definition of care. A lot of this could be learnt by a lot of people.

Mutual respect was a core value for P5; feeling ‘told off’ is therefore likely to lead to disengagement. Professionals remaining mindful of his triggers enabled him to access help and engage with services such as job seeking.

An important aspect of a personalised approach is for YP to feel able to express their needs and ask for help. P5 had the skills and confidence to ask for flexibility when he needed it. If YP feel that they are actively choosing to attend meetings, this will promote feelings of autonomy rather than entanglement, which will in turn, increase motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). P1 also stated “Being able to ask for help is quite a thing – some people aren't comfortable with it, and I think that's quite a big factor”. P6's advice to other YP is “Take advantage of the resources that are around you, they are there for a reason. Talk to the support workers, they are there to help, not to judge or isolate you as a ‘problem’”. It is, therefore, important that YP are supported to verbalise and communicate their feelings and difficulties, without fear that they might be told off, or judged.

In contrast to a personalised and flexible approach, YP talked about blanket rules as being unhelpful in that they do not allow for personal circumstances and what seems reasonable in a given context. For example, despite being very positive overall about his experience in SA, P█ recalled a time when his girlfriend was not allowed to wait indoors because this would break the visitor rule “she wasn't allowed in, she had to wait outside in the cold, I wasn't OK with that”.

Similarly, P1 described a situation where staff restricted her access to TV.

P1: . . . watching endless hours of TV, they decided to treat it like an addiction and limit my use which was the right thing to do but it really stressed me out like noooooo! . . . it was my safe happy place, whenever I got stressed or something I just needed to cool down and watch something . . .

P1 recognised that restricting access was helpful in the long term but would have liked a more gradual approach “they should have slowly lowered the amount of time instead of just going from all-day 24-hour window of whenever you want to one hour at a specific time.” It is important that YP are part of the decision-making process to ensure it is person-centred. Having an influence over decisions will increase YP’s sense of autonomy, in that their behaviours and goals are more likely to fit with their values (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

P4 recalled how it took time to feel safe talking to her SW.

P4: I remember the first day I met Becky we were sat at this table, and she was like what can I do to make your life different and make you want to be a better person. I probably just gave her a load of shit cos I thought she was just another person that was gonna come and go.

Similarly, P1 commented upon the need to build a relationship before honest and open conversations take place “you have to get to know the person before you can actually talk about stuff that you might not want to talk about with anyone”. It is, therefore, crucial to consider the timing of these conversations and review person centred plans once YP are more settled and have built a more open and trusting relationship with their SW.

### Unconditional Care

This sub-theme demonstrates how unconditional and consistent support made a difference to YP. YP experienced it for themselves, and observed SWs providing unconditional care for others.

Some YP discussed unconditional care in terms of residents having extra chances to do well and staff making sacrifices to make this possible.

P4: she has given so many people multiple chances and spoken to (her manager) to be like look, they need to stay here, and the amount of times she has put her neck on the line for other people . . .

Some YP understood unconditional care in terms of providing support to people who they are not related to.

P█: they are all such loving people, they are not related (to the residents), they are not in any form or situation where they are made to look after them, but they do it anyway, because they care, they put their heart into it, and that for me is why I'd love to get into support work, get my DBS, and get into a project like this.

The impact of unconditional care for P█ inspired him to want to do the same for others.

Whilst some YP may not have received unconditional care from parents, the SWs provided a model of care which was deeply meaningful.

P█: the fact that I was looked after so well, I would like to do that for another child that is put in the situation that I was, I wasn't given as much of a hand as everybody else, they had their mum and dad about . . . my entire time [before supported accommodation] wasn't very nice . . . staff here made it incredible, Christmas day got us all presents, that's what you'd expect from really well paid support staff, but these guys are really under paid.

P4 also identified that staff motivation to care for residents was unrelated to pay.

P4: You've just got to get to know the person you are supporting build a trust with them, build a bond and not just be in it for the money, whereas Becky was here for us. And that was a massive thing, and it feels like she is here to look after us not in it just cos it pays well or whatever.

Most YP commented on unconditional care in the sense that when they displayed challenging behaviours, staff helped them to regulate their emotions and stayed with them to provide a sense of emotional containment. "She (support worker) is really good to talk to if you need to calm down" (P6). A key feature of attachment theory is emotional containment, this has been described as 'holding' emotions (Bion, 1961); it is interesting that P5 used this wording.

P5: Steve (support worker) has been a massive inspiration me, building my life up, he is the zen helping me to control my temper. He would just hold it so well and talk me out of it, let me sit down, have a fag, calm down.

Three participants mentioned that they have a diagnosis of ADHD, alongside difficulties with relationships and managing overwhelming emotions. The link between ADHD, emotion regulation and attachment needs has been highlighted in literature (Al-Yagon et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2014). This suggests that SWs need to be appropriately trained and supporting YP with complex, interrelated needs.

Consistent emotional support was also important for P█.

P█: She would never give up on me, even when I was feeling rubbish and stuff she would always be there. At that point that wasn't something I had, cos obviously I was kicked out and stuff so I wasn't exactly speaking to my parents and stuff, they were trying to support but I wasn't exactly letting them in.

Consistent, secure relationships, during adolescence supports the healthy development of independence (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). This independence gradually develops throughout adolescence (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). However, many YP in supported accommodation are catapulted into independence due to family relationship breakdown. Consistent and unconditional support from SWs helped create a sense of stability at an uncertain time. P5 appreciated consistency in the small things such as the friendly greeting each morning.

P5: Sarah (support worker) is the love of my life, she's just such an amazing woman, every day she made it better in here, every day I'd wake up in the morning, she'd be sat at the desk waiting, she would always be so bright.

Consistency meant that YP were able to see SWs behaviours as predictable and start to build trust. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) proposes that secure relationships are built through consistently responding to a child's needs. This promotes feelings of safety; "she just made you feel safe and she was just the most understanding person ever" (P█). Attachment theory states that children

with a secure attachment view their care giver as a secure base from which to explore; safe in the knowledge they can return when desired, “I could go back to her if I needed” (P4).

P5 also provided an example of where persistent care, despite a resident’s behaviour towards the SW, led to relationship breakthrough.

P5: Staff had to deal with lots of temperament problems . . . some people go around punching a wall, support workers are supportive, literally get you wrapped up. My old support worker went through one of the most savage things, he got started on by a tenant, he had this for a good while, but he never stopped, never stopped putting his heart into it and it is safe to say that by the end of it something clicked they really got on in the end.

SWs should be reassured that they may not see the benefits of consistency for some time, but perseverance can result in breakthrough. In the literature review, I highlighted that Maslow’s hierarchy does not explain why YP may not appear to move up the hierarchy and engage with psychological support even once their basic physiological needs are met. My findings suggest that YP need time to build a relationship with their SW to enable psychological safety, before they can engage with psychological support.

It is important to note that unconditional care does not mean being a ‘perfect’ SW at all times. This is similar to the notion of a “good enough” parent (Winnicott, 1953). YP need consistency but also understood that SWs are only human.

P5: I can understand that some days they (support workers) might be like “I don’t care about you (laughing) I hope you drop in the bathtub! But that’s just on days where they are having a bad day too and they are only human, only humans trying to get their job done, they are trying to put food on their table too, they are not there to take abuse, the real part of where I believe they care is what they do, none of them have left.

It is important for YP to understand that sometimes SWs might “have a bad day” meaning that perhaps if they are highly stressed, or not feeling well, they may not respond to YP in the way that they usually do. YP with attachment difficulties may internalise a sense of shame and interpret this situation as “I am

not lovable". Therefore, it is important for SWs to be clear with the YP if *they* are just having a bad day. Many YP in SA have experienced unresolved relationship breakdown, therefore, being present at work the next day, ready to resolve any relationship difficulties and reassure the YP that they are cared about, is arguably more important than 'getting it right' all of the time.

SWs believed in the YP no matter what their current situation; it was not conditional upon their behaviour. SWs believed in YP even before they believed in themselves.

P█: Yeh she made me believe that I could do it, and turn my life around, she pushed me enough to think that I had a good life, I should sort it out. . . she helped me lots more than other people in here, I think she seen in me that I wanted to make a change, but other people just don't, I think she seen something different in me, if you know what I mean.

P6 appreciated that the staff supported his aspirations "A lot about who I want to be, Ruby supports, and she supported me through all of that all the way through as did the other members of staff (P6). YP in this study had a SW who unconditionally cared for and believed in them, which helped them to achieve positive outcomes. P█ felt that the outcome of her time in SA could have been different "if I had any other support worker god knows how it would of went."

### *Informal, Yet Respectful*

It was really important to YP that they had opportunity to informally spend time with their SW. YP built personal and informal relationships with their SWs, describing their SW as like a "best friend" or "mum". Having time to talk and laugh together was important.

P█: She just had good banter it didn't make you feel like she's the boss, she was just like that person she chilled with us, was cool she wasn't embarrassing she was just one of those people who you thought I'd actually chill with you out of (here), like where I live . . .

One of P5s favourite memories of SA was when he played a game with SWs.

P5: I will remember one thing, we were playing a card game, it was so funny, that's what made me want to know that I wanted to be a funny person, we were all genuinely gasping for air by the end of it.

P6 felt that a good SW makes an effort to initiate informal conversations, choosing a time and place when the YP feels comfortable “those informal conversations are definitely important. . . I think people are a lot more open to talking towards the evening . . . when they are just winding down and want to get stuff off their chest”.

P█ also talked about preferring informal relationships with professionals, because she felt embarrassed if seen in public with a professional.

P█: . . . Where you are under 18, they (support workers) are more limited on how kind of, friendly they can be with you. As soon as my leaving care worker sees me - she has to wear a badge - I am like ‘take that shit off’ and she knows as soon as she sees me she will rip it off and put it in her bag, even if we just bump into each other in the street it is straight in the bag because I am just like, no that’s embarrassing.

For some YP, an informal relationship came hand in hand with mutual respect “support workers do some really rewarding work they really put their heart into it, I respect it. . . I respect them they respect me as an adult. . .” (P5).

Interestingly, when YP built a genuine relationship with SWs and respected how hard they work; this changed their outlook and consequently, their behaviour.

P2: When you have that proper connection like what I had with Becky (support worker) you feel like you don’t want to mess this place around as much. Just because they are doing their job and you don’t want to add more work to them. When I first moved in here I was doing what I wanted but once I started to get close to Becky I realised how hard they do work to keep this place nice so I didn’t really mess about with that stuff.

P█: Some of the project can be quite lenient towards it (smoking weed) I was smoking while I was here, it set my depression down. When it came down to it, it was a respect thing, I didn’t want to make my room stink of weed.

Hyde and Atkinson (2019) found that positive relationships enabled care leavers to engage with support. The current findings suggest that this is also true for YPEH; respectful and genuine relationships appeared to be at the centre of positive behavioural change. YP commented upon how they had not always had positive relationships with mentors in the past. It is crucial, therefore, that

the quality of mentor-mentee relationships are carefully monitored so that proactive support can be implemented if a relationship is becoming ineffective (MacCallum, Beltman, Coffey, & Cooper, 2017).

### Organising Social or Creative Activities

P6 explained that social or creative activities helps to distract residents from focussing on arguments “staff here are particularly inclusive . . . creating environments where they (YP) don’t have to focus on feuds helps”

Me: How does SA help to create that inclusive environment?

P6: Normally at the weekend they do breakfast and mass text all the residents and whoever comes down comes down, or like Adam, one of the support workers here is like really arty, I think the arts are a really good way to . . . especially in a world that looks so bland, everything is silver.

Me: What did Adam do?

P6: A good example is, if you look at the punching bag out there it’s got a spooky face on it! There’s loads of art on the walls that the residents have done, even the staff . . . I definitely think it’s important to have an arty person around . . . Things like art therapy and music therapy are some of the most beneficial things.

P6 talked about the benefits of art in terms of bringing people together. Activities that enable social connection has been highlighted in previous research with PEH. “According to our participants, one of the greatest benefits of engaging in activities is the opportunity to socially interact. . . For many, this interaction is more important than any potential practical or instrumental outcome an activity could give them.” (Iveson & Cornish, 2015, p. 21).

Some YP referred to SWs as “like parents” or a sense of belonging in supported accommodation; “it’s like a family”. A sense of belonging is a basic human need (Maslow, 1943) and therefore if PEH do not experience this elsewhere this may support the revolving door cycle (Westaway et al., 2017). It is, therefore, crucial that YP are encouraged to engage in community activities during their time in SA so that if they remain in the area when they move on, they will have a sense of belonging in the community.

P6 also talked about making the environment look less “bland”. The physical environment is an important aspect of a psychologically informed environment (PIE) (Johnsen et al., 2008) and therefore, bringing people together to decorate the environment is an additional benefit.

P1's SW inspired him through musical activities

. . . support worker taught me how to play ukulele and guitar, that gave me a reason to get up, Ben would ask me how I'm doing with the guitar. That really really pushed my motivation, and put me where I am now, I think it's safe to say I am somewhat of a musician. . . (music) gives me motivation to want to speak. I'd love to be able to do motivational speeches using music.

This links with the previous theme in that when a variety of activities are offered, this might provide an opportunity to engage YP, who may not always appear willing to engage, through an activity of personal interest.

Two YP who I interviewed were talented artists, who reported that they do not often have the opportunity to express themselves through drawing and enjoyed the interview for this reason. Interestingly, previous research suggests that creativity is often a strength for YPEH (Fry et al., 2017). YP in the current study talked about how creativity increased their wellbeing and motivation. Previous research has identified that creativity is associated with enhanced coping in YPEH (Cronley & Evans, 2017). Group visual arts activities can increase resilience in YP with complex needs (Macpherson et al., 2016). In terms of recruitment, therefore, it would be beneficial to YP if some staff have an interest in organising musical or artistic activities (Kelly, 2017; Schwan et al., 2018). Volunteering opportunities for ex residents could also be a central aspect of recruitment; some YP were eager to volunteer as an activity leader.

P1: The support workers, they could get a couple of volunteers, I'd be more than happy to volunteer, look for donations on freecycle, like guitars, monopoly . . . I'd like to volunteer as an activity volunteer, get everyone up and motivated and feeling like they can do something. That's what I'd like to do cos I know I'm good at sport. . . Even just setting up a football game, even that would get them out. Even a day trip like at schools, you could put in a bit from your rent, Thorpe Park, theatre, something like that wouldn't be extravagant, make people feel they wouldn't want to be stuck in their room anymore. A lot of people

here smoke weed, getting out would benefit their mental health and actual health.

P█ wanted to motivate other YP to see their potential.

P█: Some people in here could have the real potential to take on the premier league, some people in here could genuinely become top MCs, some people in here could become a guitarist in a new band that is literally going to become the biggest band in the world, do you know what I mean, and they wouldn't know because they are too busy sat in their room smoking weed. And this is the motivational point that I am on about, get them into the front room, get them all a guitar in their hands, get them clean, find what their key desire is, push and motivate and make sure that they can become something that you feel – well that they feel, is better.

The value of vocational and educational activities has previously been recognised in PEH, in terms of increasing self-confidence and self-esteem. This, in turn, motivated people to have future aspirations related to work or housing (Iveson & Cornish, 2015). P█'s quote suggests that SWs need to actively facilitate YP to take part in activities “get them into the front room, get them all a guitar in their hands”. This reflects recent findings by Watson et al (2020) that encouraging YP to take action despite initially feeling unmotivated, can result in positive affect and a sense of accomplishment.

### Intrinsic Motivation to Work or Study

There are concerns around the number of YP who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), particularly YP who have previously been in care or had social care involvement at child in need level (DfE, 2018) . Therefore, I explored the views of YP who, despite experiencing homelessness and adversity, are accessing EET. If we can start to understand what enables YP to access EET, we can draw upon good practice moving forward.

Most YP were motivated by their current education, employment or training. However, one YP felt bored and unmotivated in their current job; simply having a job was not necessarily a positive outcome for them. In order to support a YP's wellbeing, they should be supported to choose a personally valuable and sustainable career (Egdell & McQuaid, 2016).

My initial definition of a positive outcome was “in education, training or employment”, however, with this in mind, it may be better defined as “accessing education, training and employment that is intrinsically motivating”.

In this theme, therefore, I will explore not only what enables YP to access work, but more importantly, what enables YP to feel intrinsically motivated to work/study. I will discuss how the key subthemes can be linked to the three elements of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

### Role Models

YP were inspired by significant people in their lives. Although some role models were only in YP’s lives for a relatively short time, they had a lasting impact on their interests and job aspirations.

Some YP talked about how their SW influenced their chosen career path.

P1: . . . she (support worker) changed my life in so many ways, I want to be a support worker here with vulnerable young adults, but I’m a support worker now for (another sector) but it’s still a support worker and I wouldn’t have had a clue what a support worker is before Becky. So, I wouldn’t have had the aspiration to work here. So, she put me down a career path . . .

Me: it sounds like she is an important role model for you

P1: she is one of my biggest role models

Other YP talked about how their parents influenced their work ethic.

P2: I look at my parents and they have a good amount of money they have a good life. . . I don’t want to be that person that borrows money. Like my dad . . . he works hard for his money. Most people think if they want something then I’ll do Saturdays, where as he does Saturdays before he actually wants something and then he thinks if I’ve done them, then I can go and get something whenever I want rather than having to wait another two weeks to actually be able to do it. That’s his mindset of work and I really agree with it.

P2 observed his father's work-related behaviour and associated working with having a good amount of money and a "good life". He therefore wants this for himself. P█ remembers her mother's work ethic from a young age.

Me: You said its always been important for you to work?

P█: I think it might just be because since a kid . . . they (parents) both had such a strong work ethic. When I was young, I was the only child and it wasn't like I was spoilt, I said mum I'd really like that, and she would do extra shifts so I could have extra stuff. . . That week I literally didn't see her cos she was working every day just so that I could have them (her favourite pair of trainers). It's things like that that I remember.

P1 and P3 talked about how their parents and family members influenced their career interests "it runs in my family" (P3). P█, however, was inspired by a counsellor in college.

Me: What got you interested in (studying) social sciences?

P█: I was having counselling sessions with a counsellor at college, and rather than trying to psychoanalyse me or anything like that she tried to teach me to understand rather than doing all that herself and that's where I got the interest for it.

This demonstrates that any key professional can inspire a YP. EPs often refer to their role as facilitatory, in terms of co-constructing understandings of problems and guiding people to find their own solutions. This example highlights the power of psychological techniques that aim to empower people by "giving psychology away" (Dutke et al., 2019; Hulme, 2019; Miller, 1969).

In relation to SDT, this subtheme could be linked to relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These findings suggest that a key factor in motivation is having a role model/s, someone who inspires you. In the current study, this was often either parents or a support worker. However, it could be any key adult; for example, P█ became interested in a career in social sciences after counselling sessions. The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years states that schools should be raising the career aspirations of YP by providing role models and inspirational speakers (DfE & DoH, 2014). Since YP did not recall role models from school, this is an area that school leaders need

to be prioritising, by seeking out inspirational speakers and role models in the community.

Whilst parents provided inspiration for some YP's career paths, most YP did not have practical or emotional support from their family when they set out to pursue their goals as teenagers. Perhaps this is why having a support worker who "believes in you" was highly valued by YP.

### *Desire to Help/Make a Difference*

Most YP wanted to go into a helping profession or use their interests and skills to make a difference. P█ "had a phobia" of reading, and therefore wanted to help other people to learn to read. She also wanted to help the environment.

P█: I think probably lots of people think this way, but I want to change the world, and do the best that I can to improve it, but I think there are only some things I can do like art, so if I can earn enough money from doing that then I can put it towards different things, like, making the world more eco-friendly.

P█ found it rewarding working with vulnerable people.

P█: my job personally I'm so grateful for the life I have I may have had a shit start but I can talk, I can feed myself, wash myself, and it really does make you think, it's a bit soppy but I'm fucking lucky at the end of the day and seeing the difference, seeing someone who can't talk, can't do anything but you can give them a tickle and make them laugh, getting up at five in the morning was worth it for that one little smile. . . it's a rewarding job.

YP wanted to help others through telling their story.

P█: I feel like if other people could hear what I have it would motivate them. I can be quite a key speaker on the motivational side, but I don't know any of the children in here now so I can sit on a professional level and actually talk to them.

P█: . . . I've enjoyed it (the interview) this is what I want to do as a support worker – make a difference to people's lives, whether that's by telling them how shit my life was and coming through the other side, because when you hear people have done well coming from the same background as you, it's reassuring.

YP actively chose to work in helping professions because they valued helping people. Helping others can have a positive impact on the wellbeing of adolescents who experience depression (Schacter & Margolin, 2019) and the self-esteem of care leavers (Thoburn, 2016). Fuligni (2019) argues that there should be more opportunities for YP to take on helping roles in their community, given the range beneficial impacts (Van Goethem et al., 2014).

In terms of implications, when supporting YP to have a sense of autonomy over their career related decisions, it will be important to encourage them to reflect on their values, such as who they might like to help and how they might like to make a difference in the world. Having time and space during the interview to reflect upon their own journey appeared to motivate YP to want to help others experiencing similar challenges. This effect has also been noted in adolescents experiencing depression (Watson et al., 2020). It is important, therefore, that key professionals working with YPEH provide time and space for reflective discussions about YPs goals, interests and values.

### Having Goals

Some YP felt that their current qualifications were a barrier to their ideal job. This will be discussed in the next research question. Despite this, all YP had an alternative employment plan that was achievable based on their current qualifications and skills. They believed in their ability to achieve their goals; self-efficacy is a key component of motivation (Artino, 2012; O'Shaughnessy & Michelle Greenwood, 2020; Sun, 2012; Welsh et al., 2018).

P1 . . . so my goal is make an app, do some incredible things, and it's a really really high goal but you know I have other steps in between to get to that and I haven't quite come up with some of the steps yet so slowly piecing that together, I know one step is finish university and in that time I will probably figure out the rest because I will learn knowledge that can help in the next step.

Some YP described themselves as resilient and willing to persevere. P4s advice to other YP was to make a plan and keep going with the belief that it will "be alright in the end".

P4: Think about what you want to do whether its start off at McDonalds, build yourself up, but think about the positives that you can do in life and the benefits that will come with it, and it'll be alright in the end, that's a big one, is that it will be alright in the end. It's like pushing something up a hill, its heavy and hard but you get to the top.

Unsurprisingly, Yates, Harris, Sabates, & Staff (2011) felt that uncertain occupational aspirations reduced the likelihood of YP accessing employment or training. YP felt that it is important that residents are supported to recognise their skills and make a career plan. "I know lots of people who don't know what to do, they probably can't see the skills that they have, but other people probably could" (P1). Supporting YP to create a clear, achievable and person-centred career plan whilst in SA is likely to increase feelings of competency and reduce the likelihood of becoming NEET. Whilst a clear plan is important, it is also important that YP are supported to have a level of flexibility to enable adaptation to change "Things just happen and you have to adjust quickly to what's going on, and I think I do that well." (P1).

In summary, SDT may be a useful framework to consider when helping YP to feel self-determined in relation to EET. SDT can also be used more broadly, to help increase their general sense of self-determination. Enhancing feelings of autonomy, relatedness and especially feelings of competency can improve quality of life of YPEH (Krabbenborg et al., 2017).

### Barriers to Positive Outcomes

Whilst the overall focus of the current research was on drawing out what *helped* these YP, interviewees also expressed interesting and passionate views around potential barriers to positive outcomes. Barriers are depicted using the following subthemes: benefits system disincentivises work, mental health difficulties, negative peer influence and stereotypes.

### *Benefits System Disincentivising Work*

Interviewees explained that the current benefits system ironically *prevents* YP accessing employment whilst living in SA, due to the high support fees. This is a

major systemic issue that needs to be addressed. There was a strong tone of frustration and injustice when YP were talking about this barrier to employment. P1 recognised that the system is particularly demotivating for YPEH who are not care leavers.

P1: One thing I hate about supported accommodation is how much you have to pay (towards rent/support charges) if you are in full time work. It is stupid there is no point in working and I was lucky cos I didn't have to pay support charges because I have a leaving care worker but people who don't have one of them and live here are literally screwed.

P1, who became homeless due to family relationship breakdown, stopped looking for fulltime employment when he realised that if he worked more than 16 hours a week, he would have to pay significantly higher rent and support fees which would put him at a financial disadvantage compared to if he were to only work part time "I was looking for work and I got told ah you will have to pay £250 (rent) I thought ah I'd rather not bother then I'd rather just stick with the 60 quid."

P5 told me that YP who have a job or want to work full time leave SA and sofa surf because they are unable to afford the high rent/support fees.

P5: My friend had a job in a kitchen while he was living here (in supported accommodation) and he basically got kicked out . . . that was because they had to make him leave because he didn't have benefits he just had a job, so he was trying to pay his rent but he couldn't afford it . . .

This issue has also been highlighted by Centrepoin, a youth homelessness prevention organisation "the way in which the Universal Credit and Housing Benefit systems interact effectively disincentives work and prevents YP moving on from homelessness" (Centrepoin, 2019 p.17). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) has also highlighted that the current benefits system makes it risky for people in poverty to get a job or raise their working hours.

The YP were frustrated, because they recognised that not having a job whilst in SA had implications in terms of future employment "It makes it harder for people when they finally get out of here to get a job because employers are like why haven't you worked in so long . . ." (P3).

Being disincentivised to work can also have implications for YP's wellbeing. Working can benefit people's mental health, their community inclusion and quality of life (Evans & Repper, 2000). P4's mental health improved when she gained employment after leaving SA, because it distracted her from negative thinking patterns.

Me: What helped your mental health?

P4: Working, working, 100% working. Keep yourself busy, because I know for a fact if I didn't keep myself busy, I would have gone downhill and sat there and cried and been like 'where did I go wrong, this is how shit my life was blah blah blah' but when you are working you don't have time to feel like shit, you just get on with it and then work just flies by then you get a nice big wage at the end and you get to treat yourself and it's just, back again. I know it's hard for people to get the motivation to find work, because it's not safe as such, being on benefits is a safe point where you're just like 'I don't have to do anything'. But it's just so beneficial working, it really does affect your mental health. That was a big point.

All YP had a history of mental health difficulties, which may have improved with work (Kaspersen et al., 2016; Paul & Moser, 2009; Thern et al., 2017; Vancea & Utzet, 2017), and yet, the benefits system made it difficult for them to access work, leading to becoming stationary with no incentive to move on "some people get comfortable, they don't want to leave, because they are happy on benefits sat in their room smoking weed doing nothing" (P5).

YP who were determined to work whilst living in SA looked for more casual, cash in hand jobs.

P█: So, it's almost to a certain extent that they (support workers) *advise* you not to work cos you just can't do it (financially). So, I went and got a cash in hand job and then after that I got a job towards the end (of staying in supported accommodation).

Since most YP who I interviewed had a history of mental health difficulties and drug addiction, a system that encourages casual, cash in hand jobs could make them extremely vulnerable to drug exploitation, for example, by county lines (NCA, 2017, p. 14). P█ mentioned that this was an issue ". . . you probably

know there are a lot of drug dealers n stuff in here (supported accommodation).“ This is particularly concerning given the significant increase in the number of PEH who have died since 2017, with drug poisoning understood as being a key reason for the increase in registered deaths (Butt & Emyr, 2019).

In addition to the financial appeal, illegal cash in hand jobs such as drug dealing can also appeal to vulnerable YP’s unmet basic psychological needs. In relation to Maslow’s Hierarchy (Maslow, 1943), this includes increased feelings of security, belonging, status and self-esteem (Robinson et al., 2019; Storrod & Densley, 2017). Having a new found purpose and identity can draw vulnerable people into drug running (Moyle, 2019). In relation to my research, most interviewees described how they felt worthless and hopeless when they first arrived in SA, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

The possible implications of a benefits and housing system that deters these vulnerable YP from accessing safe and fulfilling paid employment opportunities should be seriously considered by government, since YP may seek to fulfil their basic psychological needs elsewhere.

### *Mental Health*

All YP mentioned mental health difficulties during their time in SA, particularly towards the beginning of their residence. This included psychotic episodes, depression, anxiety, self-harm, anger and feelings of hopelessness.

Interviewees recalled feeling anxious and hopeless during their first few weeks in SA. In many respects, an adjustment period is expected. It took time, however, for some YP to feel physically and psychologically safe in their new environment. P1 did not initially feel safe amongst other residents because of the language they used.

P1: (when I first arrived) I pretty much just secluded myself into my room until I felt I was adjusted enough to talk to people, I could talk to the staff, but I was quite guarded around other people. Some of the other residents were quite rude and I wasn’t used to that, I lived in a world with virtually none of that . . . I knew swearing, but I didn’t use it unless I was

actually angry but other people use it as regular speech. Cos words are like invisible arrows, you swear at someone, depending on how dangerous it is, it can affect you, even though it's just verbal.

P4 felt anxious, isolated and without basic necessities.

Me: What was your very first day like in SA?

P4: horrible, horrible, I was terrified I was so scared I had no phone either, I didn't know anyone here, I had no way of getting hold of people, I was stuck in this flat I had no food I was just thrown into this . . . well I wasn't thrown, I was put into this flat and I felt so small like where do I start like I have no phone, nothing.

P2 explained how initially the physical environment was not beneficial for his mental health; he drew a picture of himself sitting on his bed in a very small room, staring at the wall.

P2: I remember being in the (small room), it's pretty much a waiting room that you are temporarily in until there's an actual room available . . .

Me: How long were you in the (small room) for?

P2: A month but that was long enough . . . it is so claustrophobic, and back then I struggled with breathing and stuff. Especially cos back then I didn't do anything I was just in there the whole time.

This highlights that YP had mental health difficulties and were particularly vulnerable during their transition into SA. To minimise psychological distress upon arrival in SA, YP's basic physical and psychological needs should be met first and foremost (Maslow, 1943). New residents need access to resources, such as food, a means of contacting people, and a comfortable living environment. Haigh, Harrison, Johnson, Paget and Williams (2012) highlight the impact of the physical environment on mental health.

Childhood adversity has been linked with mental health problems in childhood (Braithwaite et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Shonkoff et al., 2009) and adulthood (J. G. Green et al., 2010). Interviewees touched upon some of their personal strengths and skills, including determination, emotional literacy, and problem-solving skills. One of the most prominent skills across interviews, however, was the ability YP had to positively reframe past difficulties into a story of resilience.

P1's story was a message of success and resilience against the odds; she had accepted and to some extent, embraced adversity and difficult relationships as part of her journey. They taught her something and played a role in shaping who she is today.

Me: Would you have done anything differently at school?

P1: Knuckle down, try harder.

Me: Why is that important?

P1: Mmm well I feel like everything happens for a reason for me, I was a little shit and I didn't get the grades that I - that everyone wanted me to get but here I am doing fine. I think just be yourself, that's the most important thing. I don't think that anything should've changed because everything that happened . . . made me a stronger person now . . . maybe I wish my grades were better and I'd tried harder, but then . . . would I have ended up in supported accommodation to lead me to the job I want? . . . that's the way I look at it, everything happens for a reason. I don't think I would have wanted to have one of those lives where you can't tell a story and come out the other side. And just like "I was great, I had a brilliant childhood, I am an A\* student" otherwise life's boring!

This quote demonstrates the power of noticing resilience in the midst of adversity "it made me a stronger person". Rather than resenting past situations or relationships, she perceived adversity as part of her journey to success. Therefore, it may be helpful for professionals to support YP to explore whether there are any personal strengths that they have noticed in the face of adversity.

P2 accepted past adversities and felt that they shaped him positively "I wouldn't be the person I am now". For some YP, considering adversity as a purposeful part of their narrative helped them to make sense of and accept their past, with pride that they came "out the other side" (P1). This is not to say that circumstances had to get worse in order to get better. The YP recognised that if they had received proactive and preventative support, for example during their school years, this could have potentially made a difference to their life trajectory.

Of course, not all difficult experiences could or should be positively reframed, and the notion of 'everything happens for a reason' is not always helpful or appropriate. For some YP, it may undermine or invalidate their trauma. P█ identified that the more she simply told her story to different people, the less emotionally triggering it became. Storytelling can help YP to process and accept their past (Ford & Cloitre, 2009).

Positively reframing mental health difficulties as a story of strength and coping was helpful to P█. Some YP feel a sense of shame and regret in relation to a history of self-harm (Wadman et al., 2018). However, P█ accepted self-harm as previous coping mechanism that he no longer needs.

P█: I don't feel mentally sick, I don't need to hurt myself to fulfil myself anymore, I've got everything I need, busting my hand . . . that was my way of dealing with self-harm, just to relieve tension, it's not wrong to believe that someone with mental health issues needs to hurt themselves to feel fulfilled. I did it because it is an easy release, bam, hit the wall, all of a sudden all of that energy has gone out into my hand . . .

Emotion regulation is a commonly cited function of self-harm, or non-suicidal self-injury. Ford and Cloitre (2009) suggest that YP should be supported to reframe post traumatic dysregulation as a coping strategy that was useful at the time. YP should then be supported to develop new responses that are more adaptive. However, behaviours such as self-injury are complex; whilst it can be used as a method of avoiding distress, it can also be used as a form of self-punishment, or communicating distress (Taylor et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important that intervention is based on the function of self-injury for the individual YP.

Interestingly, P█ talked about how his support worker used to stay with him to help him to regulate his emotions. He needed to be taught this skill through co-regulation (Bath, 2008; Wills et al., 2016). YP who have missed opportunities to co-regulate as an infant, for example, due to trauma or early relationship difficulties, are likely to need support in later childhood/adolescence to develop this skill. This SW responded in an attuned and psychologically informed way. It

is important that attachment principles such as co-regulation, are central to SWs training with regards to helping YP in distress.

### Negative Peer Influence

Most YP recognised that drugs were unhelpful for their mental health, yet it was difficult to stay away from drugs whilst in SA because of peer influence and proximity.

P█: I find it's (supported accommodation) not a nice place to be especially if you want to sort your life out, the staff absolutely love me but it's the residents . . . top floor is not where you want to be that's where everyone smokes . . . all you do is smell the crap and when you are trying to get off it it's hard.

P█ explained how she made friends with residents who used drugs. This gave her a sense of belonging.

I got heavy on cocaine in (supported accommodation), cos the people I was hanging round with they always had it, I was a girl hanging round with boys so I got it for free – I never did anything for it but that was just the way it was . . . I was hanging round with those people every day cos I thought they were showing me love and I thought they wanted to chill with me, but it was obviously just a drug based thing.

Some YP described how, despite their friendship group providing a sense of belonging, they actively distanced themselves from friends who helped sustain their addiction, because they were determined to overcome their addiction. Previous research has highlighted that it can be difficult for YP to disconnect with unhelpful peers, even though they know it is for the best (Mayock, Corr, et al., 2011). Support from his parents helped P█.

. . . at the end of the day when you are trying to stop (using drugs), hanging out with people that are still doing it . . . I put myself away from the situation.

Me: How did you do that?

P█: Umm its hard, it's not easy whatsoever if you do try it, I literally got to a point where I just had to tell my parents to stop me from going out, cos all I wanted to do was go out and back then they were the only friends I had. . .

Associating with peers who engage in substance misuse can increase a YP's vulnerability (Thoburn, 2016). P1 had a sense of awareness that the social culture of his ingroup was likely to influence his behaviour with regards to substance use (Willis, Adams, & Keene, 2019), and therefore made a conscious effort to distance himself from these peers.

Previous literature suggests that some residents find it difficult to relate to peers in SA and are not eager to befriend them because they perceive their behaviour to be immature or unhelpful (Bergman, Courtney, Stefancic, & Pope, 2019). The current research reflects this; interviewees rarely spoke of other residents in a positive light. It is interesting that YP's need for belonging was met by the staff team more so than peers. Previous research highlights that a sense of community in supported accommodation can, in fact, enable the revolving door cycle (Westaway et al., 2017). In this sense, perhaps distancing from peers helped some interviewees to successfully move on from living in SA.

### *Stigma and Stereotypes*

Previous research has highlighted that stereotypes and stigma can lead to differential or negative treatment of PEH (N. G. Milburn et al., 2006; Weisz & Quinn, 2018). P6 commented on the personal impact of stereotypes, in that they can lead to a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Me: Why do you think some people might not have positive outcomes?

P6: I think it has something to do with stereotypes. Essentially people who end up at (supported accommodation) are stereotyped as being troubled, or having been in trouble, which for the most part is somewhat true but they don't exactly help that stereotype, or they play into that stereotype as opposed to using the resources and facilities to essentially get on a clearer path.

This suggests that stereotypes can lead to self-fulfilling prophesy, where YP "play into" the stereotypes (N. G. Milburn et al., 2006). This quote, alongside the negative opinions that some YP had of other residents, could also reflect the tendency for YP to distance themselves from peers who fall under negative stereotypes, in a conscious or subconscious attempt to separate themselves from the stereotype. PEH and stigma can further isolate themselves, leading to

poorer wellbeing (Johnstone et al., 2015). This further highlights the importance, as discussed earlier, of SWs providing unconditional care and believing in YP, who may otherwise be influenced by unhelpful societal stereotypes.

Hoolachan (2020) found that YPEH had a complex interaction with stereotypes and self-identity. P6 blames peers for playing up to expectations, and at the same time, highlights how destructive the stereotypes were for them. Some YP in the current study 'othered' peers as a means to distance themselves from negative stereotypes associated with homelessness. Hoolachan (2020) suggests that when YP do this, they are essentially reinforcing the negative stereotype, which in turn impacts their self-esteem. Interestingly, the young person who was most compassionate about their peers in SA was, also, more self-compassionate. This suggests that YP should be encouraged to be supportive and understanding of one another.

Interestingly, in contrast to the theory of self-fulfilling prophesy, P█ was determined to 'prove people wrong' in the face of adversity, for example, when she broke up with her boyfriend.

When we broke up everyone was expecting me to go off the rails . . . it was more like fuck everyone, I can fucking do it, and I will do it on my own . . . it sounds horrible but I don't even think it was for myself at that time at the start I really don't think it was, it was more of a "I wanna prove you all wrong" . . . I haven't had a breakdown in a very long time actually.

This suggests that the thought of proving people wrong could, at times, provide a source of motivation for some YP. A key aspect of resilience is having a strong sense of core self (Hart, Blincow, & Thomas, 2007). However, YP should be supported to develop independence in a supported, rather than forced, method (Storø, 2018).

Some YP did not want potential employers to know that they had stayed in SA; they felt that this would negatively influence employer's perception and lead to bias during the recruitment process.

P3: . . . employers are like why haven't you worked in so long, and then you are stuck like do you tell them the truth and it will go one of two

ways, and they are like urugh we don't want someone who's been in (supported accommodation), or they feel sorry for you so we are going to give you the job. And to me both of those things are bad. I don't want someone feeling sorry for me and I definitely don't want someone being like erh no thanks you've been in supported accommodation . . .

It could be argued that this was perceived stigma. However, The Joseph Rountree foundation has found that people in poverty are perceived as lacking in competence and warmth (Shildrick & Rucell, 2015). Furthermore, Harris and Fiske (2011) suggest that PEH can be dehumanised in people's minds.

Cronley and Evans (2017) highlight that research focussing on negative outcomes may further marginalize YPEH. This may be because a focus on negative outcomes feeds into unhelpful stereotypes. The current research demonstrates, that YP who have experienced poverty at the highest level; destitution, are passionate, determined, inspiring and highly competent. These success stories need to be heard so that YPEH are seen as individuals who can flourish with the right support. YP in the current study want to use their story of success to motivate others in their situation and send out a message of hope. They need to be given platforms and opportunity to do this so that unhelpful dialogues can be challenged.

### Research Question 1 Summary

YP discussed a range of factors that enabled them to overcome homelessness, including the influence of past and present relationships, with a particular focus on the impact of their SW. This research question has explored, in depth, what YP feel makes a good SW. This has implications for practice; support workers and similar professionals can use these findings to reflect upon their own practice and build upon what works well. Being intrinsically motivated to engage in further education and/or employment was also key to the YP's success; their motivation came from role models, having a desire to help and effective goal setting. YP also described potential barriers to positive outcomes, including stereotypes, negative peer influence, the welfare system disincentivising work, and lastly, mental health difficulties.

## ***Research Question 2: How do YP Describe Their School/Educational Experiences?***

Most YP interviewed in this study had very negative school experiences. For two of the participants schooling had ended in permanent exclusion. All YP commented upon having needs such as attention difficulties, literacy difficulties, social communication needs, and most commonly, mental health difficulties. EPs regularly support YP with these needs, and yet, only one YP recalled meeting an EP at school. Feeling unliked and unwanted by teachers was a common theme.

Most YP were disengaged, unmotivated and associated negative feelings with school. I found it unsurprising, and yet powerful, that the only YP currently pursuing higher education were the two who experienced fewer problems at school. Some YP described how they feel unable to follow their ideal career path due to their lack of education and current qualifications. The themes that relate to YP's educational experiences have strong crossovers with the three key domains of self determination theory (STD); competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The three key themes in the current research are feeling incompetent, lack of autonomy and broken relationships.

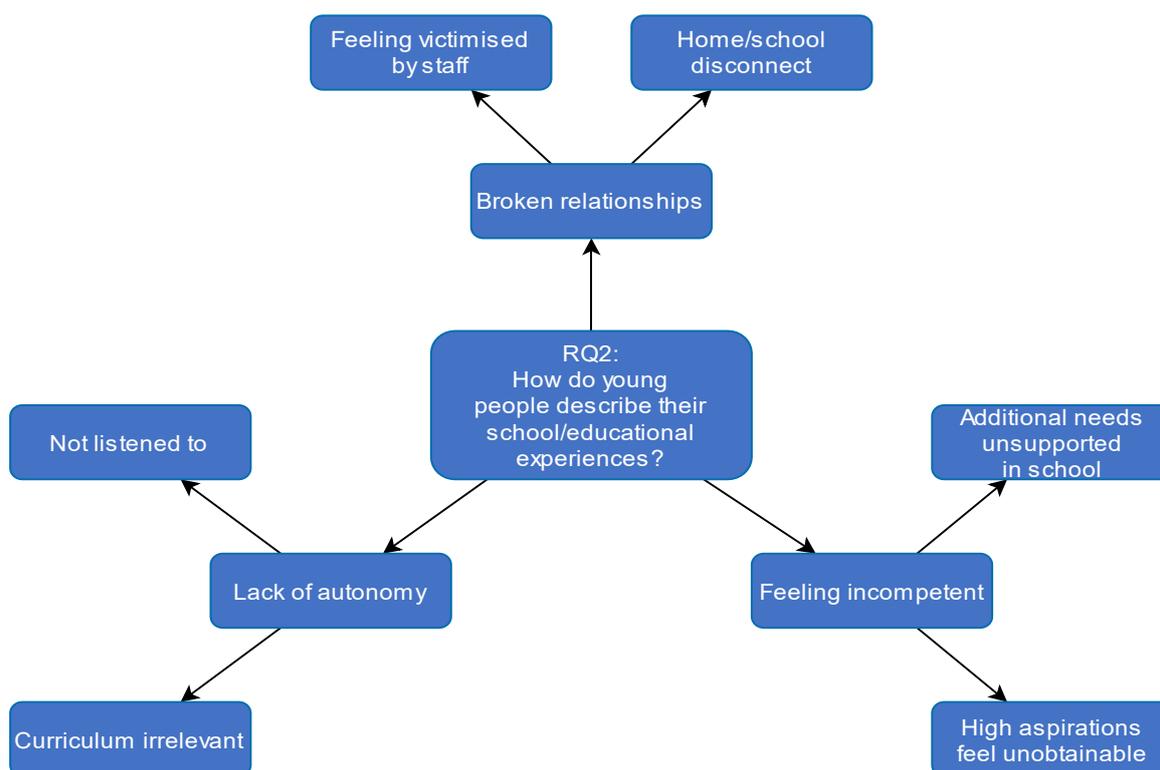


Figure 7: Research question 2: Thematic map: How do YP describe their school/educational experiences?

### Feeling Incompetent

#### High Aspirations Feel Unobtainable

Many of the YP referred to having high aspirations to become health professionals such as being a doctor, surgeon, or nurse. They felt, however, that these dream careers were unobtainable due to barriers such as leaving school with no or few GCSEs, low confidence as a learner and attention difficulties in a classroom learning environment. I asked P█ what he would do if he had left school with qualifications.

P█: I would like to go to uni, you know, and probably be like a surgeon, sounds proper weird I've never actually said that to someone, but that's what I wanted to do . . . or nah even like a mental health kind of person, cos I find the best thing for that is to share your own story so that people that are in need of help can be like 'there is a way out' cos in that moment you think 'that's it' you're just going to feel like that for the rest of your life . . .

This was an interesting comment, because perhaps if P█ had been supported to recognise his strengths and work towards his goal of being a surgeon or mental health practitioner at school, that aspiration may feel more obtainable today.

P█ felt a lack of competence in her ability as a learner, which was holding her back from pursuing her ideal career.

P█: Ideally, I want to go to university, and work (in a health care role), that's what I really want to do. But the concentration span of sitting in university . . . I know I couldn't do it. . . it just worries me that the stuff won't go in . . .

In line with literature, having high aspirations in itself did not influence the likelihood of P█ and P█ pursuing further education (Khattab, 2015). When high aspirations are combined with high expectations and/or high school performance, YP are more likely to apply to university. In practice, this means that alongside encouraging YP to have high aspirations, teachers and professionals need to help raise pupils self-efficacy by ensuring that learning needs are supported, and providing opportunities to enable YP to fulfil their aspirations (Cummings et al., 2012).

Similarly, P█ was concerned that the traditional teaching style of university lectures would make learning inaccessible. Experiential learning compared to traditional teaching is more effective and preferred by some pupils (Filippatou & Kaldi, 2010).

P█: We've got a small class (currently at college), so conversation is quite open, if someone doesn't understand something, you don't have to research later to try and understand, you can ask them to go back and re-explain. As opposed to going to Uni with 300 people in a room trying to make shorthand notes at 100 miles an hour. . . it will probably be like that when I go to Uni . . .

This highlights that YP need to have access to information about higher education courses with teaching and assessment approaches that cater to their learning style, for example, containing strong elements of interactive and discussion-based learning.

P█ also highlighted his frustration around exams. Despite having high academic aspirations, P█ felt that exams as a method of assessment did not enable him to demonstrate his understanding. He felt that exams assess knowledge in a way that does not predict someone's ability to solve problems in other contexts "in a job, you will have access to a computer where you can google that information, so why on earth do we have exams where you don't have access to a computer with google" (P█).

Teaching and learning in the UK has become increasingly performance driven (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Consequently, 'teaching to the test', has been raised as a particular issue in the UK and US (Vaughan, 2015). This reflects P█'s frustration around attempting to memorise knowledge only to pass his exams "exams are shit essentially because they are not a test of your knowledge of that subject, they are a test of your memory on that subject." Rather than teaching YP skills for life, surface level teaching results in only temporary increases in performance (Vaughan, 2015).

P█ felt that her reading ability and school non-attendance held her back from a career in medicine. However, with the help of a support network (friends, key adults in college and SWs) she was able to find an alternative career path that she was proud to pursue. "University without reading – most people wouldn't have thought of it – I'm proud of that" (P█).

Concerningly, careers advice and work experience opportunities have decreased in schools over the last 20 years (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). Pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to receive careers guidance; this disadvantage may be further compounded by a lack of contacts and social networks that otherwise provide YP with work related opportunities (Crenna-Jennings, 2018; A. Milburn et al., 2017). The findings from the current research highlight that vulnerable YP, for example, those who have had difficult school experiences and do not have a strong family/social support network, need a high level of person centred career planning to explore a variety of career paths that are both intrinsically motivating, and achievable.

#### *Additional Needs Unsupported in School*

Despite all YP having additional learning and/or emotional needs, most YP reported that these needs were not identified or supported in school. This led to P█ feeling incompetent as a learner.

P█: Dyslexia is a proper struggle, school never picked up on it, but they picked up on it here, my support worker set up an assessment that said I had dyslexia, I pretty much went through school not getting any help, not being able to read so as you can imagine I've got no grades.

This demonstrates the importance of early identification of needs to enable targeted intervention, as highlighted in the SEND code of practice (DfE DoH, 2014). Not having dyslexia recognised at school also made P█ feel ashamed and incompetent "I did go that many years (at school) without knowing about it (dyslexia), just thinking there was something wrong with me . . ."

P█ received English tuition at college, however, her anxiety related to reading, which was not addressed, impacted her confidence and ability to make progress.

P█: The English course that I was on there were only a few people in the room but only with those few people I still felt stressed and shaky and didn't want to do anything because I was fearful of people judging me because of the lack of reading even though they also couldn't read much.

Anxiety can act as a barrier to learning (Bigdeli, 2010). Whilst college had identified P█'s more apparent need for literacy intervention, a more holistic assessment needed to take place in order to identify and adapt intervention to ensure that her emotional needs were not a barrier to learning. There is a clear role for an EP here; holistic assessments are central to EP practice (Cameron, 2006).

To this day, she feels that her anxiety related to reading holds her back.

P█: I would say that I have average intelligence but because of my situation lack of reading has held me back from doing basic stuff, like I'm sure I would enjoy books, but I've actually probably got a phobia of them because of my lack of reading.

Despite all YP expressing difficulties at school, only P2 recalled meeting an EP. He described it as “just another crappy meeting”. I asked P2 what the EP could have done to make it a better meeting.

P2: I think it needs to be something more like this . . . you know, all these things (meetings) was literally just sitting there, doing absolutely nothing, just looking at them, listening to them and just replying to their stuff. But this, to be honest I've enjoyed this . . . I've got drawing, and this is something that I never had. Back then I liked drawing so . . . it (the meetings) would have just been a lot nicer you know . . . it just seemed like a lecture and something that was absolutely pointless.

This suggests that attempting to gather pupil voice is not necessarily always helpful; EP time with this YP may have been better spent doing an activity where the YP played an active role (Taylor, 2016). Feelings of incompetence and loss of hope meant that P2 perceived EP involvement as pointless “there was a possibility of them coming to see me again in a few months to see how I've done after they'd seen me, but I was just like nah don't even bother.”

### Lack of Autonomy

#### *Not Listened To*

This links with the subtheme “additional needs unsupported”, because YP felt that, had they been listened to during primary and secondary school, they would have received appropriate support.

P3 felt as though she was unable to express herself at school.

P3: They always used to say you can't wear your hair like that, too much makeup and it just used to send me crazy . . . I think it is bad that they have this set rule of what you can and can't wear, they do all this work on making people individual and speak out, but how can they do that when they are not being allowed to for the first 16 years of their life.

Non-compliance with the uniform policy led to P3 getting repeatedly sent home and ultimately excluded. It is interesting to reflect upon whether rule enforcement at the detriment of access to education was in P3's best interest. Stricter behavioural policies, for example, relating to uniform, may increase YP's likelihood of being excluded. This has been linked to greater freedoms granted

to academies (Graham et al., 2019). From a psychological perspective, P3 felt unable to express herself in school. This was an unmet need that she was trying to fulfil; identity development is a key aspect of adolescence (Klimstra, 2013). Schools could reflect on how all YP can express themselves in a way that is meaningful to them, that does not centre around their physical appearance. Given that exclusion is associated with multiple negative outcomes, for example, on attainment (McGovern et al., 2019) emotional and behaviour difficulties (Hemphill & Hargreaves, 2009) taking a psychologically informed approach to uniform policy breaches is likely to be in YP's best interest.

As discussed previously, some YP were not supported in school, perhaps due to unidentified needs. Other YP described how support was available but they had not been consulted about the type of support received; this has been reflected in previous literature around children's views of teaching assistant support (Frisby, 2016). P2 did not find the 1:1 support helpful.

P2: . . . There were times (in school) I had someone with me for some reason I don't know why, it might have been cos I was messing around too much I don't know, I think it was just a little bit of support cos I was very easily distracted.

Me: Was that support helpful?

P2: From what I remember no, it was more just annoying . . . people would always ask why you got someone with you, and I was always annoyed by it.

Similarly, P5 explained how he received support from the school counsellor, however, did not feel that his needs were understood "she didn't really help". He recalled being given information leaflets despite having difficulty reading, and the focus was on future jobs when he wanted strategies to manage anger. These views contrast with results from a systematic review that having a 1:1 mentor or counsellor reduces a YP's risk of school exclusion (Valdebenito et al., 2019). I wonder if this is because in the current research, YP's views on the support provided was not considered.

Despite being supported by different professionals who “knew their way around psychology” P█’s neighbour, who worked in health care, made the biggest impact.

P█: . . . my next door neighbour, he genuinely was lovely, he could read my mind before I even told him what was going on, if I was in a bad mood or upset he was like “what’s the matter”.

This demonstrates the meaningful impact of attuned and emotionally available adults who notice subtle changes in a YP’s behaviour. P█ reflected upon how this was missing for her. She experienced multiple ACEs during her early school years and felt that teachers could have listened to her voice by noticing her behaviour as communication.

P█: I think it’s about (teachers) making a bond with someone and actually knowing them, and studying their behaviour, how they are with their friends, and how they are with family. There’ll be something going on if they are a little shit with their friends and stuff but as soon as they are with their family, they are completely different, you know which ones the real them, you know when they are putting an act on, so I think it’s important to really study. It’s important to know what children are like in different environments.

Similarly, P5 felt that teachers need to build relationships with YP to enable an environment where YP can speak and feel listened to.

P5: I wasn’t listened to in school and if I was, I feel like my situation would have been a bit better. A lot of children are pushed into a situation where they have to just keep quiet, sit, deal with their issues . . . I feel like the teachers need to be taking a lot more initiative and becoming a lot more personal with the children in their classroom, I understand secondary schools, you’ve got millions of children, but would it hurt to learn each one of their names . . .

In the literature review I discussed how multiple ACEs make CYP more vulnerable to a range of negative long term outcomes (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Dube et al., 2001; Felitti et al., 1998; The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020), therefore, it is crucial that school staff know each child well so that they notice behavioural changes as communication, and can implement early intervention.

P█ recalls how school, professionals and parents focussed on labels, medication and ‘within child’ explanations for her behaviour. This is concerning particularly given that she experienced multiple ACEs.

P█: When I was younger they told me I had ADHD, and even now they keep trying to give me tablets and I’m like no I don’t want to take speed . . . that’s what they give you isn’t it, I don’t want to take that no way. When I was a kid my mum used to make me, I was savage as a kid, I was awful . . .

Behaviours associated with ADHD can be a response to childhood stressors and adversity (Hill, 2017; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN, 2016). The prescription of psychostimulants to YP experiencing ACEs, without a holistic assessment, is a concern for EPs (Hill, 2017) and is heavily discouraged by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2019). There is a clear role for an EP in this scenario, in terms of advocating for the child’s voice and working in a multiagency context to ensure that psychological and environmental support precedes medical intervention.

In contrast to most YP, P█ had an overall positive experience of school. He reflected on a time when his teachers listened to a concern about bullying and in response, provided timely intervention which was considerate of his wishes. This increased P█’s sense of autonomy and trust in teachers.

### School Subjects Irrelevant

The YP unanimously felt that there were major gaps in teaching YP skills and knowledge necessary for their ability to cope in the real world beyond GCSEs. They recognised that the knowledge they acquired whilst in SA would have been useful to have learnt at school.

P6: A lot of the information that they teach you (in SA) is stuff that everyone should know about and should be taught in schools but it’s not, stuff like taxation laws, how council tax work and all the things that can change it like single living allowance, being a student excludes you from paying council tax. . . .

Learning life skills during education is crucial to enable opportunity and social mobility. P█ was provided with information about her future options whilst at

college, for example, how to access SA and apply for university. Once gaining a place in SA, her support worker took her to university open days and helped her to complete paperwork. This demonstrates that the right support and information enabled P█ to work towards her aspirations, despite her lack of education “University without reading – most people wouldn’t have thought of it – I’m proud of that” (P█).

Moving away to university was a positive outcome for this YP, and an example of how a support network and access to information enables social mobility. However, the support must not stop here. Inequalities and barriers continue for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds even once they have entered higher education (Lawler 1999; Friedman 2014; Savage et al 2015; Friedman 2016a; Ingram and Abrahams 2016).

YP, specifically care leavers, are underprepared for the responsibilities that come with independent living, such as managing bills (Gill & Daw, 2017). YP need to be taught life skills to help enable social mobility. The Sutton Trust (2019, p7) proposes that the government should fund schools to teach essential life skills (defined as motivation, confidence, communication, self-control and stress tolerance) in and out of the classroom. Anecdotally, I have noticed that there are programmes available for YP at risk of exclusion, however, since they are expensive for schools, they use the programmes often as a last resort. The views of YP in my research suggest that this kind of programme needs to be woven throughout the curriculum and widely available as a preventative intervention rather than a reactive strategy. I would also argue, based on the YP’s views, that essential life skills should include knowledge and skills for independence, such as setting up a bank account, applying for jobs and renting accommodation. Some YP also commented that despite successfully moving on, they were still lacking some core life skills, such as the confidence to talk to new people on the phone, and difficulty understanding bank letters.

### Broken Relationships

#### *Feeling Victimised by Staff*

YP recalled memories of a rules based, punitive approach at school, which led to them feeling isolated and unwanted. This is a stark contrast to schools' duty to be inclusive (DfE, 2014; Government Equalities Office & Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). The school rules system combined with YP's social, emotional and behavioural needs ultimately led to permanent exclusion for some YP.

The bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) emphasises how the environment and the individual interact. This was evident in the relationship between the rules system and the YP. For example, YP felt that they were preconceived as "naughty" (P3) "a little shit" (P4) or "the mess around kid" (P1). This meant that they felt that the teachers were waiting for them to "mess up", and then when they did, disciplinary action, such as being "kicked out" (P1) reinforced the belief that they were not liked. This led to YP thinking they "might as well just mess around" (P1) aligning their behaviours to the perceived teacher expectations.

P1: When they opened up my file the first thing it came up with was kid in care so obviously, they labelled me as a naughty kid. Honestly, I proved this test one day one of my friends, she was quite good in school, she went in wearing tight jeans . . . no one said a word to her all day but me, I was in school less than 10 minutes – "your trousers – you need to go home and change them!" like we literally done that on purpose to prove a point.

This can also be understood as self-fulfilling prophesy (Merton, 1948).

P1: I was always the mess around kid, always getting in trouble and stuff, sometimes getting sent home and it kind of just followed me if you know what I mean. . . But when it got to the real you know, college is a big thing, time to knuckle down, I was in that mode to settle down and they said whatever happens in your last school, it's a fresh start now, it won't follow you or whatever. It did. All they did was watch me . . . seeing if I was going to mess up. . . So it kind of just made me feel like why the hell should I try and sort it out I might as well just mess around and that didn't go well so I just left in year nine.

Feeling unwanted and unliked triggered further challenging behaviour. This suggests that disciplinary approaches to managing challenging behaviour was

not only ineffective; it exacerbated the problem for these YP. This led to fixed term exclusions (FTEs) and permanent exclusions, which are ineffective in supporting positive behaviour change. For example, permanent exclusion from one school increases a child's risk of further exclusions throughout their school life (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013). Furthermore, the DfE describes FTEs as a "sanction" (DfE, 2017). However, given that many pupils who are excluded have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (Graham et al., 2019) escaping the challenges of school may be a temporary relief. This was certainly the case for P3 "As soon as they used to say I'm excluded I used to be like mint, I can go and sleep, do what I want – you know I hate school".

The number of FTEs has been highlighted as a concern; 438,300 FTEs took place in England during the academic year 2018-2019 (DfE, 2020). Given that P█ had already experienced separation from family and multiple foster placements, the appropriateness of exclusion as a 'sanction', is ethically questionable. It was perceived as another rejection "they hated me" (P█).

Physical assault against an adult is a leading cause of permanent exclusion in England (DfE, 2020). When YP went into SA, restoration rather than rejection was a powerful and new experience.

P5: Jake (support worker) got things thrown at him, nearly got punched (by a resident), and at the end of it he (Jake) still turned around and asked if he was OK. That's showing that you care, not retaliating in a stupid way. He literally said 'we can talk about this'. . .

This shows that YP are reflecting upon and making sense of interactions they observe. Previous research describes the notion of managing challenging behaviour that would previously lead to evictions in a more flexible manner as 'elastic tolerance' (Breedvelt, 2016). In psychological terms, it could be described as differentiation of approach according to a YP's unique psychological and behavioural needs.

Having a positive relationship with staff is a key predictor of positive wellbeing amongst YP at risk of exclusion (Mowat, 2010). Students highly value a positive student-teacher relationship (Allen et al., 2020). P5 was passionate about the need for relationships to be a key priority for teachers.

P5: Schools need to be pressing into getting staff that know what they are doing, not just because they have a DBS but because they have a background in loving these children, I can't remember a single teacher that genuinely actually cared about me but here (in supported accommodation), I have handed you off six or seven names (of support workers) and I have only known them since I was 17. . . I can understand why teachers have a hard time; children are annoying . . . but when it comes down to it is about being able to have the patience for it and listen to them . . .

P5 felt that support staff should go into schools to provide training on supporting vulnerable YP with SEMH needs. Interestingly, although there is no empirical research to date, St Basils, a youth homelessness organisation, has adopted a PIE approach. As part of this approach, they support schools to become more 'psychologically-informed' when working with pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs (St Basils, 2019). This suggests that collaboration between youth homelessness organisations and schools may be a way forward. Children who have a secure attachment usually develop an internal working model of adults as predictable and trustworthy (Bomber, 2007). Other children have not been able to rely on adults in the past to provide structure and safety. These YP may develop an internal working model of all adults as untrustworthy. As a survival mechanism, therefore, they attempt to control situations, resisting adult imposed rules. Understanding this psychological process may enable teachers to empathise with children who do not respond conventionally to rules. Using an empathetic approach to behaviour management, as opposed to a punitive approach, fosters a sense of mutual respect between student and teacher, reducing the rate of exclusion (Okonofua et al., 2016). Reflective of the current findings, Jones et al. (2018) found that YPEH in America experienced punitive as opposed to trauma informed approaches during their school life. YP felt that exclusions were counterproductive and punitive approaches focussed on the behaviour rather than the underlying reasons, and that this had negative implications for them. This highlights the need for all educational professionals, internationally, to carefully consider the implications of using punitive approaches where, in fact, trauma informed approaches are needed.

### Home-School Disconnect

Some YP commented that there was little or no communication between home and school. “I didn’t care if I got told off because my dad didn’t care, if they said ‘I’m calling your dad’ I was like alright, well he won’t answer anyways so good luck” (P█). Grolnick (2009) suggests that children are likely to be motivated to engage in school when their caregivers participate in their education. They are also more likely to perform better academically (Wilder, 2014). However, there are a range of barriers that prevent parental involvement in education (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Teachers require support and training to address these barriers (LaRocque et al., 2011).

Some YP referred to hostile home school relationships “mum and nan used to fight all the time to get me help” (P█). Parents whose children present with social, emotional and mental health needs, such as ADHD, and/or are at risk of exclusion often feel criticised, blamed and silenced by school staff, resulting in parent-teacher relationship breakdown (Parker, Paget, Ford, & Gwernan-Jones, 2016) Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2016).

There was a sense of school and home being two separate systems.

P█: and the reason my foster parents wouldn’t punish me really is because they’d always say you are technically being punished at school and school wouldn’t punish you for something you’ve done at home. . . they (foster carers) were like you actually haven’t done anything wrong, they just hate you pretty much.

This emphasises the importance of bringing parents alongside school to create a sense of working together in a solution focussed manner to support YP, rather than working separately with a focus on punishment. Positive and effective relationships between parent and teacher promotes children’s learning and development (Benjamin, 2015). Empowering and enabling teachers to build relationships with vulnerable families is key in supporting children’s learning (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

### Research Question 2 Summary

YP's negative school experiences can be understood through the lens of SDT. They reported feeling a lack of autonomy in terms of not being listened to and being required to study irrelevant subjects rather than learning valuable life skills. YP had high aspirations but due to the barriers they faced during their education, such as unidentified and unsupported additional needs, they felt as though their aspirations were less attainable. YP were also lacking the relational support that they needed during their education. Implications were discussed around how schools respond to challenging behaviours and enable positive, effective communication with parents.

Despite these difficulties during school, most YP had never met an EP to their knowledge. One YP recalled meeting an EP; reflecting upon his experience provides insight for EPs into what could have made it a more positive and meaningful experience for him.

***Research Question 3: What do Support Workers Feel Leads to Positive Outcomes in Young People?***

I will now discuss the findings from two focus groups with support workers (SWs) who worked for the youth homelessness prevention organisation. The findings will be presented under research question three and four (Figure 8; Figure 9 respectively).

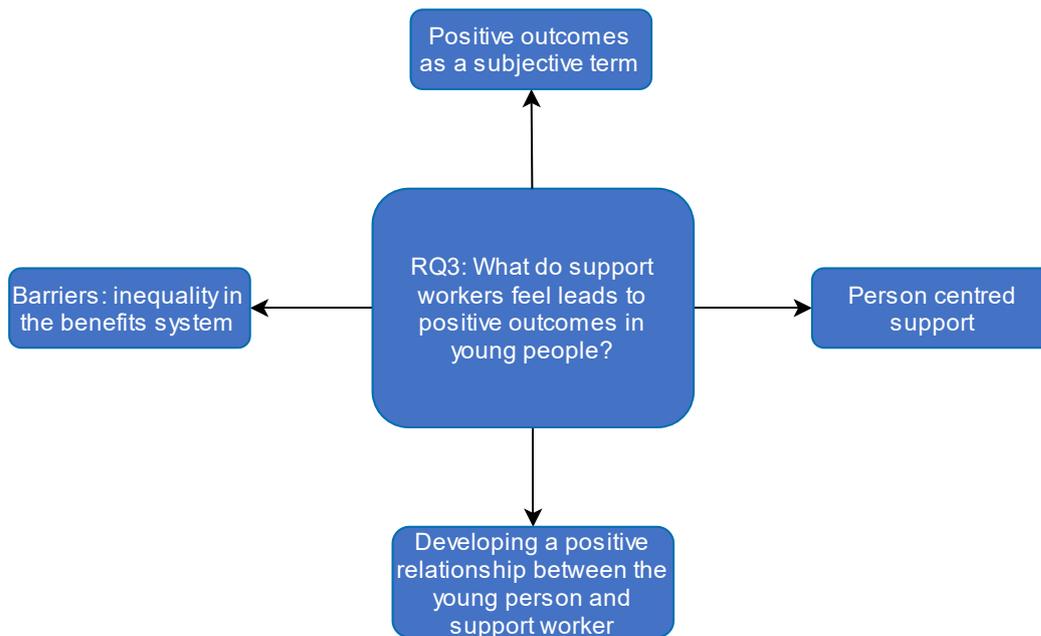


Figure 8: *Research Question 3: Thematic Map: What do Support Workers Feel Leads to Positive Outcomes in Young People?*

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### Positive Outcomes as a Subjective Term

Support workers (SWs) defined positive outcomes as meaning many different things.

SW2: Being able to move on and live independently . . . understand how to manage their money . . . what society would class as normal. . . on the path to independence!

SW4: not getting in trouble all the time, not breaking the law

SW1: not in arrears

SW3: being safe

SW2: being relatively happy, being able to uphold the things you want to achieve, like not being in crisis

SW1: yeh not in crisis

SW3: is that our definition of normal - not in crisis!

SWs in both focus groups felt that positive outcomes are unique to the individual, and capture achievements that are seemingly small, but significant positive outcomes for the individual.

SW6: something as simple as getting on a bus . . . to them, that's like a huge milestone (SW5 agrees) they've achieved

SW4: Like being able to cook an egg, you know

SW2: or "you said hello!"

SW4: yeh or being able to speak, it really depends

SW2: yeh or eye contact, the tools they need to move on.

SWs highlighted that since they support a broad age range of YP (16-25), positive outcomes also vary depending on age.

SWs definition of positive outcomes differed from YP's definition, in that YP commented upon feelings, such as feeling proud to have their own home, hopeful and happy to be alive. This suggests that when talking to YP about their aspirations, picturing how it would make them feel may be more motivating than picturing only the outcome.

### Person Centred Support

This theme further supports previous findings that person centred support is key in promoting positive outcomes in PEH (Hennessy, 2007). Support workers (SWs) continually referred to YP as individuals, and therefore, the support provided reflected this. This included person centered planning when a YP moves into SA; asking about their goals and personal aspirations SW3: "It gives them a point of reference it's not just another professional asking you to jump through hoops, you are framing everything in terms of what they want to achieve". In line with YP's interviews, SWs felt that having personal goals is key to success "SW4: hope is key isn't it, it's giving them a vision of the future that they can see". Watson et al (2020) found that taking a goal-oriented approach increases motivation, by helping adolescents to identify their personal values and plan action or activities in line with these values.

SWs discussed how the type of support varies depending on the YP's individual strengths and needs. Some YP may already be independent in most areas, and just require housing support. Whereas some younger or more vulnerable

residents need a high level of individualised support.

SWs also commented upon how noticing and praising small steps of progress is a key aspect of person-centred support.

SW3: just those small little conversations and if anything is going to be successful it has usually come from that I find, any sustainable change, it's just those little . . . when somebody believes in you sort of thing.

SW4: and then *really* big them up – you got to that job interview on your own – brilliant.

SW1: yeh praise the small things.

SWs identified flexibility as a key attribute of a good support worker, because this enabled them to take a person-centred approach.

SW2: He (a resident) did struggle to engage, he was going out, not attending support sessions and he had a change in support worker who's been more flexible with him, managed to get to know him a bit . . . he has now got everything in place to hopefully have a successful move on.

Flexible systems which take into account a YP's readiness for leaving care also promote positive outcomes (Atkinson & Hyde, 2019).

SWs commented upon how getting to know YP as individuals and remembering small but personal details helps to build trust.

SW1: I think the simplest things can like make a difference - like I've made hot drinks for them before and if you can remember how they have it, that just makes them really happy. And you make them comfortable and you make them much more open and stuff.

SWs mentioned that even after leaving SA, YP continue to receive an individualised level of support, based on their needs.

SW2: She (ex-resident) hasn't got anyone, and I think ahhh, but when I left her I had linked her in but she still rings me and I think ah I've closed you but I'm still like linking back with her and trying to find her someone else or somewhere else to get in. So that's what I think you can't just

SW1: no

SW2: . . . sometimes they don't want anything to do with you but sometimes they do because you are still what they remember from supported housing,

SW1: yeh and a safe space I guess

SW3: I agree, and I think that's probably the most important thing we can do, linking in with the community.

Supporting YP to link with the community promotes positive outcomes (Hawkins & Abrams, 2007; Laser & Leibowitz, 2009). This quote demonstrates that some YP may need additional time and support to transition into the community; having their key adult from SA available is crucial for this graduated transition. Care leavers have access to a leaving care worker up to age 25, who act as a 'corporate parent' supporting them in times of need. There should be a similar professional available for estranged YP, who do not otherwise have a trusted adult who can step in and provide person centred support when needed.

### A Positive Relationship between the Young Person and Support Worker

Relationships are at the centre of psychologically informed environments (PIEs)(Haigh, Harrison, Johnson, Paget, & Williams, 2012). At the time of the focus groups, SWs had heard very little about PIEs. And yet, supportive and nurturing relationships were clearly central to their practice.

SWs talked about the importance of being the YP's advocate, especially in the most difficult of circumstances.

SW3: . . . he was always kicking off and arguing and getting into fights with other residents and within about three weeks of moving in he had this court case which was booked in and coming up, he was one of mine at the time and I wrote a supporting letter for him to take to court and I let him read it because although he was a nightmare in some respects he'd done really well in others . . . when he read that letter he started crying because nobody had ever spoken up for him before . . . he took that in and whilst his behaviour was still pretty off the wall, you could see he was trying he just didn't have the skills . . .

YP in the current study did not have advocates in school; they felt unliked and as though adults were looking for them to “mess up”. Having advocates and trusted adults in SA was a new and meaningful experience for them. Although this YP’s residence ultimately ended in eviction, which may appear as a negative outcome on the surface, the impact of a positive relationship was evident months later.

SW3: . . . he was holding down this labouring job and he wrote to us to thank us because even though he got kicked out he was like you believing in me really changed things.

SWs held a positive, empathic and hopeful view of residents. Unconditional positive regard is considered a key element in building relationships with CYP who have experienced attachment difficulties and trauma (Hughes et al., 2015).

SW2: I think for me, there is good in every one of them – you can see bad things that they might have done, but they are just like lovely, and nice and funny

SW1: and they didn’t choose to be where they are

SW2: no . . .

When I asked SWs how they built positive relationship with residents, their answers reflected the core principles of the PACE approach: playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy (Hughes & Golding, 2012; Phillips, Hughes, & Melim, 2020). The PACE approach can help build trusting relationships particularly with CYP who have a history of trauma and attachment difficulties. More current attachment theorists highlight that mentalisation; the ability to understand how thoughts and feelings link to behaviour in oneself and others, is a result of secure early attachments (Jain & Fonagy, 2020). The PACE approach may provide an opportunity to develop mentalisation skills through attuned, curious interactions. The following table provides examples of quotes from SWs that reflect the different principles of the PACE approach.

Table 3: *PACE Approach and Example Quotes*

Playfulness	SW1: yeh! And we will play – we are never too serious with them, I’m not sure what everyone else is like at theirs, but if they are not getting up for an appointment, that they know they have to get up for, then we will just knock on the door like an annoying older sibling like “come onnn wakey wakey” and
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	they are like “leave me alone” and you are like “no I’m going to stay here singing songs until you leave!” and then they do get up in the end and have a laugh – some don’t – but most do.
Acceptance	SW4: and again, that witnessing thing of ok I can see you are angry, I can hear you’re upset.  SW1: Like we’ve got some residents who are heroin users and they are like ‘I’m just a dirty smack head’ and we are like ‘no you’re not, if we’d been through what you’d been through we’d be doing the same thing. You are just trying to cope . . . Just making them feel normal, what they’ve gone through is massive.
Curiosity	SW3: We’ve just had a couple move in that are really difficult, and I think some people have already written them off, instead of writing them off, you’ve got to think OK let’s actually look into why they are doing this, there’s obviously a reason, let’s read their story, and then you find it . . . ahh that makes complete sense, and then it’s trying to just win their trust – that is the biggest thing, they don’t want to trust you because they get moved around so often.
Empathy	SW1: having empathy for them, just listening and not judging, sometimes we are not there to fix we are just there to let them be heard so if they want to have a moan, let them have a moan and just be like ‘yeh that is really shit, that is really shit what you are going through’ rather than going ‘yeh but . . . this is good or this is good’ because they are just like ‘fuck off no its not!’ SW4: being witnessed, everyone wants just to be witnessed. SW2: Yeh. Be seen.

## Barriers to Positive Outcomes

### *Inequality in the Benefits System*

As previously discussed, the YP in the current study were frustrated that the current welfare system and high support fees disincentivised residents to work fulltime. Similarly, SWs also felt injustice and frustration for these residents.

SW3: it’s really hard when you are working fulltime, 9-5, Monday -Friday, you are only actually seeing £300 a month from your wages because you are paying us £6-700 pounds a month, everyone around you is sat at home all day, they are getting £50 less than you are, and you are working full time . . .

SWs provided examples of how the welfare system and high support fees has directly caused other residents to avoid getting a job, give up their job, or reduce their working hours.

SW2 gave an example of one resident who recently gave up her fulltime job because the high supported accommodation rates made it difficult for her to save for the deposit she needed to move “she’s actually quit her job now because of that” (SW2). Other SWs gave examples of where YP “are in rent arrears because they’ve started working” (SW3). Consequently, YP who are eager to work fulltime are “encouraged” to only work part time whilst living in SA, so that they are not required to pay the full accommodation costs.

SW1: . . . we have one that’s been working for ages and he loves his job and would happily up the hours, he did for a little while but then he realised how much money (in rent/support fees) he had to pay and he was like ‘oh my god I’m not doing that!’ and reduced it (his working hours) back down.

SWs felt that with the welfare system as it currently stands, the perfect scenario would be for YP to get a fulltime job the same day as they move out of SA “ideally but it just doesn’t work that way does it” (SW3). Whilst this may be the ideal situation from a financial perspective, ongoing support from key trusted adults helps vulnerable YP to successfully engage in employment (Sanders et al., 2020). In this sense, it is important that YP are encouraged to engage in employment whilst they have access to supportive key adults in SA.

SWs emphasised the long-term benefits of working whilst in SA, such as private sector landlords being more likely to accept tenants who are not in receipt of housing benefit or universal credit, as evidenced in a recent survey (Ministry of Housing, 2018). However, SWs felt such long-term incentives are not motivating, because YP need to see more short-term rewards for their work “SW3: aren’t there some studies that show teenagers don’t think ahead”. This effect is known as temporal discounting (Christakou et al., 2011; de Water et al., 2014; Hartley & Somerville, 2015; Steinberg et al., 2009).

There was a strong consensus that the current system prevented YP from working and caused YP to turn to less ideal alternatives.

Me: from what I’m hearing it sounds like it puts people off getting a job . . .

SW3: 100%, 100%

SW1: they just don't see the point and then it encourages them to sit around and do nothing.

SW2: or do cash in hand work.

As discussed in the YP interviews, putting residents in a position where their job options are limited to cash in hand jobs could be harmful, particularly for YP at risk of drug exploitation. They also felt that having YP living together without the incentive to work led to regression in some areas.

SW2: . . . that's quite hard if you've not been working and you've been sat around

SW1: . . . sleeping patterns are so bad . . . some of them stay in bed until two or three and when you suggest getting a job they say 'that's impossible have you seen how I sleep? Or 'oh I'll get a night job' . . . no you had a good sleeping pattern when you came – get it back!

SWs discussed some potential solutions for the current problem, although they did not feel that they had power to influence the system. This included enabling YP to keep a higher percentage of their income, so that there is a financial incentive to work.

SW1: I'd say when they are earning money if they are in supported housing, I don't know how they would calculate it but making it so that they are not paying such a huge chunk out of their money (for rent/support fees). . .

Alternatively, an initial period where YP are able to save their wages would incentivise YP to gain employment and save necessary funds.

SW3: having a 2- or 3-month break where everything you earn is yours. Because they are not rich you know, they are not going on holidays or anything.

SW2: yeh they are not earning loads.

SW3: Just as a setting up home fund. SW3: if it could amount to a financial incentive where you say 'if you get a job, everything here is still paid, you still get your universal credit, because in the long run, if that encourages people to work, they will be paying that back in tax in the next 8 months.

Whilst the system disincentivises most YP to work, there are separate rules for care leavers “SW1: (care leavers) only pay a maximum of £60 per week for their room, regardless of what they earn. Leaving care will then pick up the rest of the money . . .” It is recognised that care leavers are financially better off than peers who have had difficult backgrounds, but not entered the care system (Thoburn, 2016). Care leavers have been identified as highly at risk of becoming NEET (DfE, 2019) and therefore, it is crucial that they have incentives to work. SWs felt a sense of injustice for estranged YP who experienced traumatic and complex childhoods, and ultimately family estrangement “SW3: I know they (care leavers) have had a hard lot of it, but most of them have”. Estranged YP have neither support from family, or the government, and it can be difficult for SWs to explain to estranged YP that they are not entitled to the same financial support as care leavers “it’s gut-wrenching because they are like ‘but why, what about me’ and I am like ‘I know’ (SW1).

This inequity in the system, however, reiterates the position in previous research that the needs of estranged YP require more consideration (Bland, 2018; Blake, 2017). YP and SWs highlight that a key challenge for this group is not having financial support from family or the government; they appear to fall through the gap. Financial support alone, however, is not enough; a consistent, genuine and personal relationship with their corporate parent is crucial in supporting care leavers to achieve positive outcomes (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). SWs felt whilst care leavers had appropriate financial support, consistent relational support appeared to be missing for some vulnerable YP.

SW2: . . . It’s trying to just win their trust – that is the biggest thing, they don’t want to trust you because they get moved around so often, especially leaving care, they just get picked up and dropped, and literally dropped. From what we see they barely see their leaving care workers

SW3: same here

SW2: which is really sad, because they yearn for that connection with the person that’s consistently there, but *not* there

SW3: that’s the sad thing, that is the one consistent support in their life.

Leaving care workers support YP as corporate parents (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). These findings highlight that firstly, other vulnerable YP, such as estranged YP, would benefit from corporate parenting. However, this needs to reach beyond financial support. A consistent key adult is essential for a YP to feel settled as they enter adulthood (Thoburn, 2016). Resources are likely to be well spent providing YP with a key professional who has the time to build a trusting relationship, and proactively support YP to avoid debt and financial crisis.

### Research Question 3 Summary

Reflective of YP's views, SWs also felt that having a trusted, emotionally attuned SW who provides advocacy and person-centred support, lays the foundations for positive outcomes. Aspects of the welfare system, however, create barriers to accessing employment, particularly for estranged YP. Support workers highlighted that YP need more regular relational support; key professionals need to be provided with sufficient time and resources to offer this.

### ***Research Question 4: What Helps Support Workers to do the Job Well?***

#### Continued Professional Development in Recognition of an Increasingly Complex Role

SWs highlighted the challenges of supporting YP with complex needs, and of different ages.

SW3: About 80% of our move ins now tend to be care leavers, under 18s, whereas a year or two ago it was the other way around, under 20% maybe so generally their support needs are a lot higher. On paper we are housing support, in practice it's just everything.

SW1: much more than that.

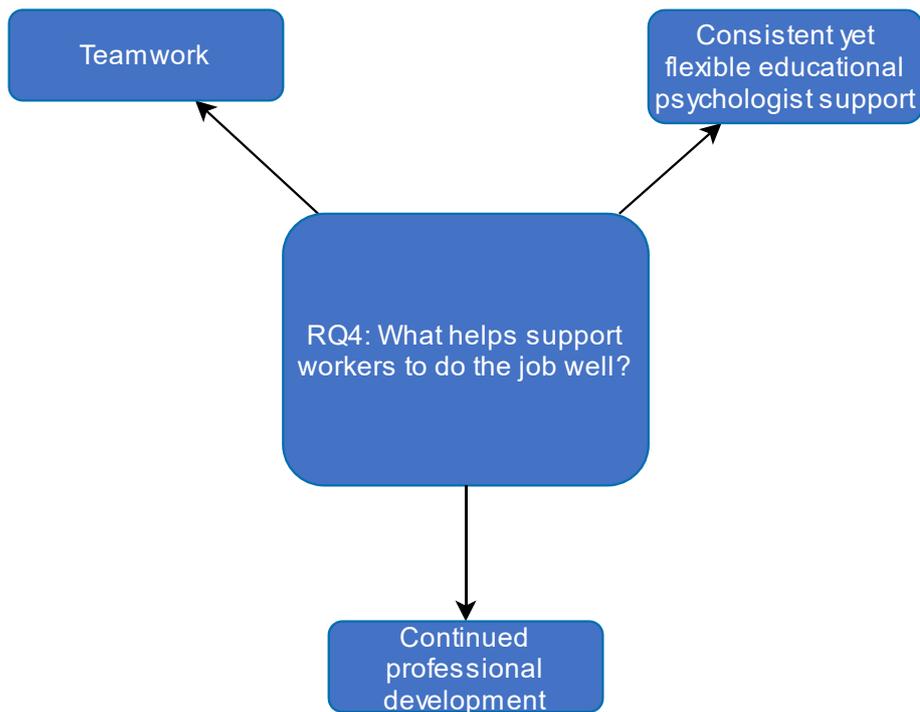


Figure 9: *Research Question 4: Thematic Map: What Helps Support Workers to do the Job Well*

This results in SWs needing a broad skill set. Supporting YP with mental health needs was one key area in which SWs valued training from EPs and other relevant agencies.

SWs recognised the balance between being broadly trained, but knowing when to refer to other agencies who are better placed to support a YP. Cornes, Joly, Manthorpe, O’Halloran and Smyth (2011) suggest that the role of housing SWs should be developed in order to reflect the increasingly complex needs of residents. This could involve SWs co-ordinating a multi-agency approach to YP’s support.

SWs expressed an interest in personal development and career progression, but barriers to this, for example, not knowing of recognised qualifications that they can gain.

*Consistent yet Flexible Educational Psychologist Support*

When I asked SWs what they knew about the EP role, initially SWs were uncertain about who EPs are and what they do “SW3: we can infer what it is from the name I guess, but apart from that no.” SW1: “That they mainly work in schools, I think? Not a lot”. SWs went on to talk about the psychologist who they work alongside, not realizing that she is, in fact, an EP.

SW5: She’s a psychologist, I’m not sure if she’s an educational psychologist, but we have a lady that comes here one or two mornings week . . . and she does group sessions with our staff, and if you need to speak to her on a 1:1 basis you can . . . she helps out if you are struggling with a particular case load . . . you can sort of have a discussion she helps you to understand why that person reacted in that way and what you can do to support that YP. She’s also there if staff have had to deal with something that’s actually had a bit of an impact upon them and she’s there to have a chat about that and how you can help yourself and things like that. So similar on a staff level to a counsellor but you can discuss caseloads and stuff with her as well.

This suggests that SW1 had a meaningful and positive understanding of her EP as a facilitator, enabling psychologically informed support for both staff and YP. The SWs reactions demonstrate that the title *educational* psychologist can restrict people’s understanding of the role, in thinking that it is mainly associated with schools. It also demonstrates that EPs need to be more explicit and transparent about their skills and job title, since promoting the profession and broadening understandings of the EP role will open new doors for the profession.

SW5 highlighted that it is helpful knowing that the EP will be available, in person, at the same time, on the same day.

SW2: she can talk you though certain things and if that works or doesn’t work you can review that again . . . so I think having her coming in weekly is quite good because she’s available and I can be like I’ll speak to her about that on Tuesday.

SW1: And you have a bit more time to build rapport.

Due to the unpredictable nature of the SW role, SWs also appreciated the EP being available to email spontaneously, with any issues, if they were unable to meet in person. In the same way that SWs need to be flexible with YP, SWs

highlighted that they need this flexibility with EPs. This suggests that whilst group supervision can be beneficial, having flexible, regular opportunities for spontaneous 1:1 supervision may better meet the needs of SWs. Having a positive relationship with an EP, combined with flexible service delivery, are some of the most important factors for commissioners when deciding whether to purchase EP time (Lee & Woods, 2017).

### Teamwork

Teamwork helped SWs to overcome the challenges that their role poses. They felt that having time for spontaneous, informal conversations with colleagues was essential for informing the best way forward for YP. SWs also emphasised the value of being able to step in to support one another at short notice.

Using focus groups enabled me to explore how participants interacted (Hollander, 2004). Not only did SWs describe the value of teamwork, but supportive working relationships were also evident in the way in which staff communicated with one another during the focus groups; in a humorous and affirming manner. SWs highlighted that feeling safe to ask for help and advice from colleagues who may have a different perspective, positively impacts SWs feelings of competence and their ability to support YP.

### Research Question 4 Summary

SWs reflected upon the complexity of their role and the broad skill set needed to effectively support residents with complex needs. SWs described the range of training opportunities that they have access to in their role, and how continued professional development, often related to mental health and wellbeing, helps them to support residents. SWs were interested in career progression and felt that formal recognition of their skill set, perhaps through relevant qualifications, would be valuable. Teamwork was perceived as essential for SWs to do the job well, due to practical and emotional support from colleagues. SWs also described receiving flexible, yet consistent support from a psychologist working within the organisation, without realising that they were an EP. This highlights

that the EP job title does not reflect the broad skill set of the profession, specifically, their roles outside of educational settings.

## **Chapter 5: Phase 2**

In phase 1, I explored the perspectives of young people (YP) who have experienced homelessness, and support workers (SWs) from a youth homelessness organisation. Drawing upon the findings from phase 1, I will now consider educational psychologist's (EPs) views on this topic, and how they may support YP at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

### **Methods**

#### ***Recruitment of Educational Psychologists***

The EP focus group was scheduled as part of a whole service Continued Professional Development (CPD) day. All EPs and trainee EPs within one EP service were invited via email to take part. Five EPs and two trainee EPs took part on the day. Some participants had direct experience of working with YP experiencing homelessness, others had experience in related services such as youth offending teams, leaving care teams, or with families who had experienced domestic violence. Other participants had very little or no experience in this area.

#### ***EP focus group***

I chose to gather data through a focus group because post 16 work is relatively new for many EPs following changes to the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014). Furthermore, youth homelessness is a niche area. The group format allowed participants to build upon their own and each other's answers and agree or disagree with views that they may not have thought of in an individual interview format. Focus groups, therefore, can be a useful method of eliciting a variety of views (Bryman, 2016). This is ideal given the novel nature of this research. Sharing ideas and knowledge was a useful intervention in

itself; EPs reflected upon how their participation was useful CPD and will impact their practice moving forward (see Appendix J).

My intention was to gently guide the focus group, ensuring that the research questions were considered whilst allowing the flexibility for participants to take ownership, ask each other questions, build upon and challenge one another's views. This approach enabled participants to highlight issues that they considered important or significant (Bryman, 2016).

See Appendix K for a copy of the focus group question prompts.

### Creating Vignettes based on YP's stories

I created six short stories, or vignettes, based on each YP's interview from phase 1. These vignettes formed the basis of discussion in the EP focus group. I chose to use a portrait vignette style as I wanted the YP's authentic voice to shine through (Spalding & Phillips, 2007). Trustworthiness of vignettes can be increased through member checking (Spalding & Phillips, 2007), therefore, I called YP to check whether their vignettes reflected their experiences. YP were pleased with their vignettes and felt that I summarised their interview well. P1 suggested a minor change to the wording. P5 fed back that it was "better than I could have written it myself!" I explained how I intended to use their pseudonymised vignettes, to ensure transparency.

I chose to use vignettes as a discussion tool in the EP focus group because they do not require participants to have prior knowledge on the topic (Allison & Liker, 1982). I introduced the focus group by reassuring participants that everyone has different levels of knowledge around youth homelessness, and everyone's ideas are valuable. As part of their day to day role, EPs read and formulate initial psychological hypotheses based on written information, for example, from referral forms. Therefore, I expected that EPs would feel comfortable with this activity.

I also used vignettes because I wanted the YP's voice to be at the centre of the focus group. I explained to EPs that the vignettes were authentic. For this reason, I asked EPs to keep details confidential, and to return paper copies of the vignettes at the end of the focus group. Initially I wondered whether to select a couple of vignettes to use in the focus group, to save time. However, I felt that since each interview was unique and interesting in different ways, I wanted each YP's story to be heard. Therefore, all EPs read all six vignettes.

I wanted to ensure that participants took ownership of the focus group. Therefore, I asked the group whether they would prefer to read the vignettes to themselves, or aloud to the group. They chose to read to themselves. After discussing the vignettes, the second half of the focus group consisted of further questions related to my research questions. I wrote the questions on cards for participants to read out, to minimise my verbal input.

I reflected on the sensitive nature of the vignettes in supervision. Through discussion with my supervisors, I decided that rather than presenting each vignette in full in my thesis appendices, I would create a composite vignette, combining sections from different vignettes. Whilst sections of each vignette are not identifiable on their own, the cumulative effect of information makes participants more identifiable (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.169). Interestingly, some YP were happy for their story to be identifiable and said that I could use their real name. In supervision, however, I reflected on how sometimes feelings can change over time, and whilst YP may be happy with personal information being shared now, this may change over time. See Appendix L for the composite vignette.

### Pilots

I discussed the focus group questions with my thesis supervisors (qualified EPs) and piloted the focus group questions and vignettes with my EP placement supervisor. The vignettes took my supervisor approximately two minutes each to read, and therefore, in order not to overload EPs with too much information at once, I decided to split the six vignettes into two sets of three, with opportunity for participants to reflect and discuss in between.

My placement supervisor fed back that it was difficult to remember her reflections from the first vignette, by the time she was reading the third. I therefore provided access to paper and pens to enable focus group participants to annotate the vignettes and record their thoughts. They all made use of this.

### ***Analysis***

I transcribed the focus group myself and followed the six steps for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as described in the methodology chapter.

## Findings and Discussion

The research questions addressed in the following sections are as follows:

- Research Question 5: Reflecting on the vignettes, and EPs' relevant experience/skills, how could EPs support YP at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness?
- Research Question 6: What might be the barriers and facilitators for EPs to engage in this work?

When developing themes, there was often overlap between the potential EP role and facilitators/barriers. Therefore, I have chosen to present the findings to both research questions within one thematic map.

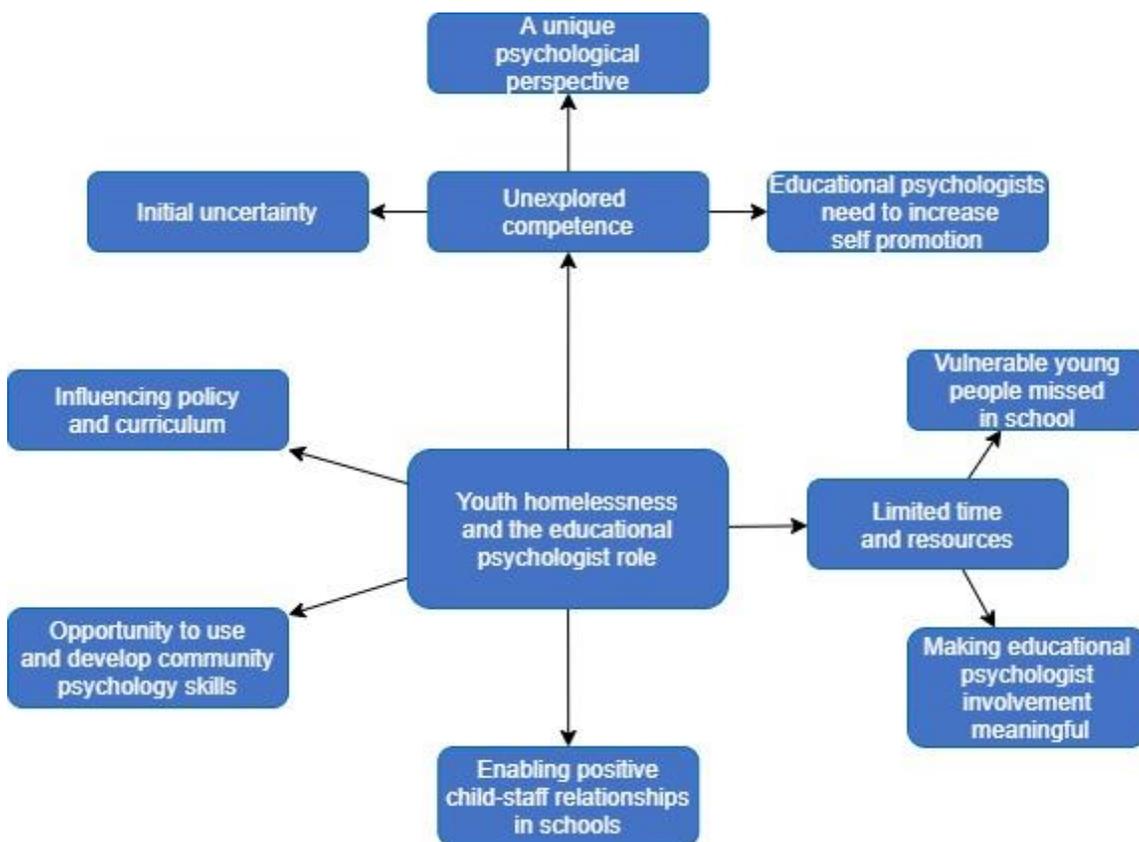


Figure 10: *Research Questions 5 and 6: Thematic Map: Youth Homelessness and the Educational Psychologist role*

## ***Unexplored Competence***

The Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1961) proposes that people may not be aware of their own skills and capabilities. This appeared to be the case for EPs, because they initially were uncertain about their role in relation to youth homelessness, but through discussion, EPs became more conscious of their relevant skills and knowledge, particularly their unique contribution as psychologists. Once EPs are more aware of their potential role, there is a need to promote this. I will now discuss this in detail under the following subthemes: initial uncertainty, a unique psychological perspective, and EPs need to improve self-promotion (Figure 10).

### Initial Uncertainty

At the beginning of the focus group, there was initial uncertainty around the topic of youth homelessness. EPs had varying opinions around the definition of homelessness, whether an EP would know if a YP is homeless, whether an EP *should* ask direct questions around homelessness, and if so, how they should ask these questions sensitively “I’m not sure I would feel comfortable knowing how to ask that” (EP3), “it could feel quite intrusive couldn’t it” (EP4). They recognised that it might be difficult to establish whether a YP is homeless since some YP may not want to disclose this information.

EP3: I don’t *think* I’ve worked with anyone but I think it’s quite hidden, particularly those post 16 who might be sofa surfing or in temporary accommodation, I don’t think we are always told, or that staff even know, usually.

People who are sofa surfing or in temporary accommodation are difficult to count and so do not show up in official youth homelessness statistics. This is known as hidden homelessness. As a result, little is known about the prevalence and impacts of YP who sofa-surf. However, surveys suggest that sofa-surfing is a common experience among YP (Clarke, 2016; Curry et al., 2017; Fildes et al., 2018).

EP2: yeh you might find out indirectly, through consultation, it might be stated on (referral form) but I don’t know how it would be hidden – how would there be a YP who was homeless and you not know.

EP3: I think it depends on how you are defining it, cos if they are technically still registered at parents address but they are living with friends, that might not necessarily translate into what we are told.

EP1: and that isn't something necessarily that a setting would know, that would depend on the YP offering that information . . .

One EP reflected upon the fact that she was unsure what support is available for YPEH, particularly if they are not in an educational setting.

EP4: . . . my guess would be that a lot of these YP might be NEET – so if they don't have access to people at college for guidance or support, how are they accessing that support – if you are in care its almost easier cos you have a leaving care advisor that can help you sort that stuff out but actually that's quite overwhelming – if I got made homeless tomorrow I probably wouldn't know what my first step would be let alone when I was maybe 16.

When first asked about youth homelessness, EPs initially minimised or underestimated their relevant knowledge, skills and experiences, perhaps due to feelings of uncertainty. However, after some reflection, EPs commented upon their work within services where homelessness was a key factor, such as in youth offending teams, leaving care teams, or with families who had experienced domestic violence and were staying in refuges. Some EPs had more personal experiences with homelessness, such as staying in temporary accommodation themselves, volunteering at a soup kitchen, and reaching out to people on the streets. Once EPs had time to reflect, they realised that they had encountered youth homelessness more often than they initially thought.

EP5: Now that we are having this discussion this is bringing back memories of a YP who I did a psychological advice for . . . his best friend ended up possibly staying at his house and sofa surfing so safeguarding came up not only for this YP but also for his friend, was he staying there? Does he have a home? There was this whole safeguarding issue I needed to talk with school.

Some EPs, however, felt a sense of uncertainty about whether they can help to prevent homelessness, partly because they were unsure about the causes of youth homelessness. This also meant that they were unsure about where the point of intervention would be. As discussed in the literature review, the causes

of youth homelessness are often a complex interaction between different factors (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018), however, many of the risk factors associated with youth homelessness are areas in which EPs have a wealth of experience. This includes supporting children looked after (CLA) (Bradbury, 2006; Lightfoot, 2013; Mann, 2012; Norwich et al., 2010) and children experiencing adversity and difficulties around parent-child relationships (McKeating, 2018). Therefore, it is likely that if EPs have a better understanding of the causes of youth homelessness, their current role in terms of preventing youth homelessness will become clearer.

EP1 highlighted that other professionals working with children and YP may also experience uncertainty around the topic of homelessness, or not even consider it at all.

EP1: I don't know if homelessness is something that people have on the tip of their tongue as something that is part of daily dialogue . . . in five years of working in post 16, not one session on homelessness or the possibility of homelessness, and that's a really relevant age group.

EP1 felt that educational settings need training to raise the topic of homelessness "into consciousness" so that they are better able to identify when a YP may be experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. This highlights the need for EPs to receive continued professional development (CPD) training around the causes of youth homelessness, so that they can raise the profile of youth homelessness in educational settings, and enable schools to identify and support YP who are at risk.

#### Bringing a Unique, Psychological Perspective

The causes of homelessness can be a complex interaction between a number of risk factors (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018). This means that it is important to take an individualised and person-centred approach to understanding youth homelessness. Facilitating deeper exploration and a psychological understanding of the individual child within context is key to the EP role, and highly valued by school staff (Lee & Woods, 2017). Similarly, Cameron (2006) describes the EP role as exploring and understanding individual needs, as well

as complex situations and environments, through a psychological lens. Reflective of this, EPs in the focus group considered each vignette individually, and explored how YP's experiences may be understood through a psychological lens, drawing upon relevant theory. The complex backgrounds and difficult educational experiences that the YP described were highly familiar scenarios to the EPs.

EP6: . . . I try to view it as not necessarily thinking of homelessness as an extra challenge that requires extra provision and extra thinking around it but falling back on the things that we know as psychologists are really important for YP and this (the stories) kind of cements it doesn't it really, thinking about relationships, thinking about resilience, thinking about motivation and identity all those kind of things and like you (EP2) said, thinking about resilience in the individual sense but also what in a community, what in society makes people resilient, what are the things that help them . . .

At the beginning of the focus group, EPs thought that they did not have relevant experience and knowledge around the topic of youth homelessness, but having read the YP's stories, EPs realised that fundamental knowledge as a psychologist is relevant. This included identifying unmet needs.

EP5: . . . Maslow, I think, for me, we talked about basic needs, if we all look at home lives and maybe what they were kind of missing . . .

EP3: There is something about belonging, where they do belong, and where they are getting that need met.

In contrast to identifying unmet needs, EPs use solution focussed approaches to build upon what works well (Harker et al., 2016). EPs commented upon how solution focussed approaches could be key in supporting YPEH "there's certainly that thing around resilience, we do a lot of solution focussed stuff as well thinking about successes and what is working well" (EP2) . . . "there's a lot of room for positive psychology" (EP3).

EPs promote empathy through increasing understanding, positively reframing behaviours, and challenging assumptions (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). EPs in the focus group commented upon their role in terms of helping others to see things from the YP's perspective.

EP4: I think there's definitely something in there around understanding young people's narratives and how they tell their stories and their understanding of what they've experienced.

EP6: . . . And what are their core constructs and how do they understand that, and how do other people understand those as well. That shared understanding where they can come to that place where they feel understood.

### Educational Psychologists Need to Improve Self-Promotion

EPs, firstly, need to explore their competencies so that their skills are within their conscious competence (Birch, 1970), so that they can then promote their role.

EP6: Something again, which is important and comes about a lot is that we are not very good as a profession at telling other people what we are good at and getting our expertise out there so that people know what we are doing. . . I think charities and other organisations could be forgiven for not thinking "ah I'll contact the educational psychologist". We are not great at telling people what we are good at and what we do, and that's something I think about quite a lot.

The introduction of the Children and Families Act (2014) provides an exciting opportunity for EPs to broaden their practice to working within post 16 settings (Atkinson et al., 2015). Additionally, the shift towards traded psychological practice also provides an opportunity for EPs to work more creatively (Lee & Woods, 2017). However, previous research had identified that the EP role can be restricted by the assumptions of other professionals (Bradbury, 2006; Norwich et al., 2010). Furthermore, staff in post 16 settings may be unaware of the breadth of work that EPs can offer (Newman, 2020). It is, therefore, important that EPs have regular opportunity to reflect upon, define and develop their role within this age group, so that this can be made explicit to other agencies and commissioners. EPs need to think creatively about what skills they want to promote to potential youth homelessness commissioners, with the understanding that this may be further developed with the commissioner to ensure that support is needs led.

In summary EPs need to firstly explore and recognise their transferable skills and knowledge, so that they can then promote their unique contribution. Feelings of uncertainty around youth homelessness is an apparent barrier for EP involvement, whereas recognising transferable skills is a facilitator.

### ***Limited Time and Resources***

#### Vulnerable Young People Missed in School

EPs highlighted that the high levels of statutory work, including Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments, have led to a decrease in preventative work with CYP who are not perceived as having the highest level of need.

EP6: In terms of barriers to our involvement it is all about our capacity and like I said earlier, we are being asked increasingly to do a lot of one specific work and that kind of work is very much where people aren't gonna slip through the net there. They are very much in the net and in the system.

EPs strongly felt that there needs to be more preventative work “without that barrier of who is going to pay for it” (EP3). This issue needs to be highlighted and addressed, since most of the YP in the current research did not have their needs sufficiently identified and met at school, which had long term implications in terms of their confidence and competence as a learner, and their career aspirations.

EPs also highlighted that even if there was sufficient time and resources, preventative work should focus on universal provision because identifying YP who are at risk of homelessness is complex.

EP2: I would argue that even if we had 300 hours a year with a school, would one of these YP have been brought to my attention? . . . which is where it has to come back to the universal provision.

Therefore, EPs felt that supporting schools to develop universal provision and whole school policies that focus on belonging, relationships and resilience may be the most effective method of reaching vulnerable YP who may otherwise be missed. This being said, it is important that EPs raise awareness of the risk

factors for youth homelessness, because if homelessness is perceived as random, this may discourage preventative action (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018).

### Making Limited Time with CYP Meaningful

EPs reflected upon the impact of the lack of resources and time. They often came back to the comment from P2, that his meeting with an EP was “just another crappy meeting”. The EPs reflected on why P2 may have felt this way. EPs were concerned that some YP have a lot of professionals in and out of their life, who do not have the time and capacity to build meaningful relationships. EPs reflected upon ways in which they can avoid being “just another crappy meeting”, for example, by focussing more on whole school systemic work, helping adults within school to harness pupil voice, making the most of windows of opportunity with YP by using engaging activities, and remaining transparent with YP about the limited nature of EP involvement to help manage expectations. Giles and Rowley (2020) found that YP value building a relationship with the EP over the activities done together; EP involvement was most meaningful when the YP felt kept in mind. EPs in my research knew the value of this connection but felt limited by time constraints.

EPs felt that if there was sufficient funding and capacity, however, they could provide meaningful 1:1 intervention for YP at risk of homelessness, for example, around motivational interviewing, person-centred strengths based work, and mental health support. Whilst much of the EP role is likely to be at a systemic level, consideration should, therefore, be given to how EPs can have more capacity and opportunity to build relationships with CYP.

### ***Enabling Positive Child-Staff Relationships***

Bretherton and Munholland (2008) suggest that children develop an ‘internal working model’ based on their relationship with their primary caregiver. This model provides the basis for all future relationships. Given that the leading cause of youth homelessness is family relationship breakdown (Homeless Link, 2018) and high numbers of care leavers go on to experience homelessness

(Stirling, 2018), it follows that many of these YP will have experienced relationship or attachment difficulties with their main caregiver.

Adolescence is a crucial time for YP who have experienced inconsistent early attachments to reshape their internal working model through repeated exposure to consistent, caring key adults who recognise and meet their needs. EPs recognised the power of positive relationships for the YP in the current study, and how this was missing from their education.

EP3: They all talk about these positive, supportive relationships have happened after they've left school and after they've experienced homelessness and if they'd happened before, potentially – potentially because we can't account for all the other factors, but potentially could have prevented (homelessness) or could have been a protective factor.

EPs felt that an important aspect of building relationships is helping school staff to understand the function of a child's behaviour.

EP4: I see our role as not necessarily working directly with those YP but working with the adults to reframe some of those thoughts about the YP and all the things that we do around behaviour as communication and what are they trying to tell us, reframing some of those thoughts I see that as an ongoing part of our role I feel like I'm doing it constantly

Some YP in the current research felt that their behavioural, psychological and learning needs were not understood or supported in school, and yet, they felt forced to take medication to help control their behaviour. Supporting staff to explore environmental factors that impact behaviour rather than taking a within child perspective is a key aspect of the EP role (L. Cunningham, 2016; Golann, 2015).

Concerns and frustrations have been raised by teachers, parents and MPs around the impact of challenging or disruptive behaviour in the classroom (Bennet, 2020). Perhaps unhelpfully, Ofsted measures appear to focus on improving behaviour (Harford, 2014) rather than understanding what a child or YP may be communicating by their behaviour. I would argue that there needs to

be a measure for improving relationships. Insecure attachment has been linked to emotional and behavioural difficulties (J. Cunningham et al., 2004). A system which focusses on behaviour, rather than relationships, may breed resentment of vulnerable YP who display challenging behaviours.

EPs reflected upon why the YP in the current study felt victimised and unwanted. EPs wondered whether the pressures that teachers are under may come across to children as resentment towards them. Perhaps reflective of this, Perryman and Calvert (2020) found that whilst teachers entered the profession wanting to work with YP and make a difference, they became resentful of the system, and left for reasons such as the work life balance and performance driven nature of the role.

EPs, therefore, felt that they could promote positive staff-child relationships by supporting teacher wellbeing. Although, they recognised that there needs to be changes “higher up” to reduce the pressures that teachers face.

EPs wanted more opportunities to develop their skills and confidence with systemic practice, particularly in relation to working with school leaders and members of staff who can initiate change at a systemic level. For example, EPs felt that a key part of their role in helping to prevent youth homelessness is around raising the value of relationships and pastoral work across the whole school. This includes creating a whole school culture where relationships are put first, as the prerequisite to positive behaviour and learning progress.

EPs also wanted to provide a greater role in the training of pre-service teachers. Trainee teachers need to be empowered to build relationships with vulnerable pupils by learning strategies for building secure attachments in the classroom (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Alongside this, EPs felt that teachers need to be relieved of high pressure related to performance and pupil attainment and provided with the time needed to build feelings of trust, safety and belonging in the classroom.

### ***Opportunities to Use and Develop Community Psychology Skills***

EPs reflected upon the complex family dynamics that were evident across the vignettes. Family relationship breakdown is a leading cause of homelessness

(Homeless Link, 2018). Enabling a YP to stay in the family home reduces the risk of homelessness (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018, p.113).

EPs also reflected on the childhood trauma that was evident from the vignettes. Childhood trauma and adversity has been linked with later homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Herman et al., 1997; Stein, 2006; Weston, 2015).

EPs are ideally placed to minimise the above risk factors; as community psychologists EPs should be involved in supporting family and school systems. The YP in the current study experienced relationship difficulties not only in school, but also there was a home school disconnect, and relationship difficulties with parents and family members. Video interaction guidance (VIG) is an intervention that can help promote the positive relationships that precede engagement in learning, for example, when there are relationship difficulties between home and school, the child and staff, or the child and parent (McKeating, 2018). The facilitator films a parent-child interaction and then selects short clips that demonstrate examples of attunement. Focussing in on these clips enables and empowers parents and children to repeat attuned interactions and behaviours in the future.

MacKay (2006) highlights that as community psychologists, EPs should have a holistic oversight of the YP within the home, school and community settings. It is interesting, therefore, that some EPs were unsure whether it was within their remit to ask directly about homelessness. In order to have this holistic oversight, it is important that EPs are trained in how to ask sensitive questions about a YP's home environment. This reflects work at the mesosystemic level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) supporting the relationships between different systems within the microsystem, such as family and school.

### ***Influencing Policy and Curriculum***

EPs identified that there needs to be systemic changes in policies at an organisational level (in schools and youth homelessness services), and policies at governmental level such as the curriculum, and the welfare system.

EPs felt that homelessness is not on school's agenda because their focus is on attainment, due to pressures from the government.

EP2: How many schools would see preventing homeless as their job – probably none, or next to none . . . I don't know how a head teacher looking at this and think "this is something I need to invest time and money in". So, there's a real barrier there.

EP6: . . . my point about the wider political context is where it becomes hard because you are right, there's no way it (youth homelessness) is ever going to be even close to GCSE results or those kind of things within the current climate (EP2 agrees).

From year 9 upwards, schools are required to think beyond GCSE grades and have a greater focus on preparing YP for adulthood. The P4A framework states 'independent living' as one of the four key areas and outcomes measures. Developing life skills and mapping out a career plan have been highlighted as important aspects of building resilience (Hart, Blincow, & Thomas, 2007). And yet, YP felt that schools focussed on exam results rather than relevant life skills and knowledge. Perhaps schools are preoccupied with exam results because they are closely measured, monitored and linked to the school evaluation, whereas rates of youth homelessness upon leaving specific educational settings is not measured. Since there has been a greater focus on preparation for adulthood in recent years, there needs to be a greater focus on measuring the outcomes that this framework is based upon. Youth homelessness should be a key focus, particularly within secondary schools and post 16 settings, when YP are nearly adults and parents are no longer legally obliged to accommodate them. There also needs to be greater access to education around youth homelessness in schools, as a prevention initiative (Homeless Link, 2018).

#### Research Question 5 and 6 Summary

The EP focus group explored the current and potential role of EPs in relation to supporting YP experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. When given the opportunity to reflect on the vignettes and the topic of youth homelessness, it became apparent that EP's have relevant skills, previous experience and can provide a unique contribution through applying psychology at both an individual and systemic level. EPs highlighted some of the opportunities and challenges related to the prevention of later homelessness, whilst YP are at school. Having

more time to engage in preventative, systemic practice will be key in developing the EP role as community psychologists.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The current research aimed to explore what enables young people experiencing homelessness (YPEH) to achieve positive outcomes, and how educational psychologists (EPs) can support with this. I will now discuss the findings in relation to implications for the EP role, limitations of the current research, and recommendations for future research.

### **Implications for Educational Psychologists Working in Schools**

Youth homelessness may initially seem like an abstract or unrelated topic to be talking about with regards to school age children. However, many of the risk factors for homelessness stem back to childhood, and areas where EPs and schools can have an impact. Furthermore, due to the SEND reforms (DFE & DoH, 2014), EPs are required to work with adolescents and young adults in post 16 settings, who may in fact be experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. EPs, therefore, need to have more CPD around youth homelessness, so that they can identify and intervene appropriately.

### ***Development of Systemic Practice***

YP described complex needs, including social and emotional difficulties, specific learning difficulties, and complex family dynamics. These needs were not understood holistically in school or college, and YP did not receive appropriate intervention. EPs provide holistic assessments that critically explore the potential role of biological, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and environmental factors (Frederickson & Cline, 2015). There is, therefore, a clear role for EPs in terms of helping educational settings to unpick the different factors that contribute to a young person's difficulties.

A key issue that EPs raised in relation to the above point, was that currently, EPs have limited capacity to engage in non-statutory work, meaning that there is little time to support vulnerable YP who do not have an EHCP. This reflects the national picture that since the increase in statutory work following the SEND reforms in 2014 (DfE & DoH, 2014), recently qualified EPs feel that their workload has increased and the variety of work has decreased; 76% say that they “never seem to have enough time to get everything done on their job” (Lyonette, Atfield, Baldauf, & Owen, 2019, p.7).

Despite being highly vulnerable during their school years, only one YP recalled meeting an EP. Given that only a small percentage of children obtain an EHCP (DfE, 2020a), it is not surprising that vulnerable YP, like those in the current research, may not access EP support. EPs highlighted the need for more preventative practice and systemic work in schools, reaching a broader range of vulnerable YP.

EPs wanted more time and opportunity to work with school leaders on wide reaching preventative work that promotes the power of positive relationships. For example, EPs want a greater role in initial teacher training, more opportunity to reframe school behaviour policies as relationship policies and time to support teacher wellbeing.

The YP’s vignettes reminded EPs of valuable preventative work that they already do, for example, the everyday EP role in helping staff to understand behaviour as communication. A common theme amongst YP’s interviews was challenging behaviour being misunderstood and met with disciplinary action, leading to further marginalisation and exclusion. EPs should be encouraged, therefore, that the work they already do around understanding behaviour as communication is key in supporting vulnerable YP who may be at risk of later homelessness. Drawing upon the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), EPs could support school staff to explore the interaction between the individual child and their environment, key adults, and school systems. In line with the current findings, EPs need to highlight that children are highly

aware of whether they are liked by school staff. Feeling unwanted and victimised can reinforce challenging behaviours in school, as discussed on page 111. EPs could work with staff to sensitively unpick whether there are any positive or unhelpful cycles or patterns of staff-child interaction. Allowing a safe space for staff to reflect upon how a child may be thinking and feeling, as well as their own personal or professional beliefs and how this consequently shapes their interactions with the child, would be key to this process.

In the current study, family relationship breakdown was a key factor for most YP in becoming estranged, and consequently, homeless. Complex family dynamics, however, did not suddenly occur, they were present during the YP's time in school. Previous research has found that YP would like more family mediation before relationship difficulties reach breaking point (Homeless Link, 2018). There should be increased capacity and opportunities for EPs to work at a systemic level to support family relationships whilst YP are of school age, through interventions such as VIG (McKeating, 2018) to help build stronger foundations, potentially reducing the likelihood of relationship breakdown and estrangement in later adolescence.

### ***Making Education Meaningful to Young People***

The YP's findings highlight that during school, they lacked feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness. In line with self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), EPs should help to ensure that these three needs are fulfilled, to raise YP's motivation and wellbeing as learners.

#### **Autonomy**

YP emphasised the importance of goal setting in relation to their personal success and achievements; according to SDT this may be because it increased their sense of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). EPs should, therefore, promote the importance of person-centred career planning and goal setting, particularly for YP from low socioeconomic backgrounds, or YP who may lack social support, work related opportunities or contacts.

YP felt that they had no choice about their education. To them, the education system revolved around irrelevant subjects and exam results, which they did not feel assessed their understanding or potential. EPs, therefore, need to encourage schools to have some flexibility within the curriculum for YP to build upon their strengths and interests so that they can see the relevance of education in relation to their personal goals. Equally, educational settings need to have access to resources to enable them to offer varied and alternative curriculum options.

YP felt that conventional schooling did not prepare them for adulthood. YP highlighted that since some children do not have support and guidance from parents, the education system needs to take more responsibility for equipping them with life skills and knowledge around homelessness and independent living. This is reflective of YP's views in previous research (Homeless Link, 2018). Youth homelessness prevention initiatives working alongside schools are currently proving effective in other counties (Schwan et al., 2018). EPs could play a role in promoting the importance of this at both a school and governmental level in the UK.

### Competency

Feelings of competency are also crucial for motivation and wellbeing (Krabbenborg et al., 2017). Therefore, EPs should support YP to feel competent in the subjects that are needed as precursors to their chosen further education course or employment. EPs can do this through supporting school staff to build students self-efficacy as learners by appropriately differentiating learning tasks according to their progress and tailoring learning to their interests. YP also need to have access to information about higher education courses with teaching and assessment approaches that cater to their learning style. For example, if attention difficulties make conventional teaching approaches less accessible, YP need access to courses that contain strong elements of interactive, practical, and discussion-based learning.

## Relatedness

Education will be more meaningful and motivating in the context of trusting and supportive relationships. YP were clear that their support worker played a significant role in their success. EPs wondered in retrospect, if YP had experienced a significant and meaningful connection with a key adult during their school life, how this may have changed their trajectory. The current research describes the attributes of a good support worker, from YP's perspectives. EPs could use this as a framework when supporting school staff who are working with vulnerable YP in schools, to help embed these crucial relationships during YP's school years.

The current findings highlight that home-school disconnect can impact YP's motivation to engage with school. The role of EPs in bridging the gap between home and school, therefore, should not be underestimated.

## **Implications for Educational Psychologists Working in Youth Homelessness Organisations**

### ***Using Positive Psychology and Person-Centred Approaches***

There is a clear role for EPs to use positive psychology when working with YPEH. YP in my research reflected, often spontaneously, on their personal characteristics that enabled them to thrive and overcome adversity. They also reflected on how their adversity shaped them into the person they are today, for example, how it made them a stronger person, or more able to empathise and motivate others with similar experiences. It is interesting that most interviewees already had this ability to focus on their strengths. This further supports recent research that strengths profiling can promote positive outcomes in YPEH (Cooley et al., 2019). Strengths profiling is an intervention based on personal construct psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955) and has been found to promote resilience, self-worth, and well-being in YPEH. EPs, therefore, could play a key role in promoting positive outcomes in YPEH by providing strengths-based, psychologically informed interventions.

It is important to note, however, that focussing only on happiness is a common critique of positive psychology (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017), as it limits consideration of other inevitable emotions and less positive experiences. In the current research, for example, YP talked with passion and conviction about the struggles that they faced in education, and the barriers that they faced in society as young homeless adults. It was important that I allowed time and space to hear and value these aspects of their narrative, to consider YP's views holistically and authentically.

EPs discussed how they could support youth homelessness organisations to implement a psychologically informed environment (PIE) (Haigh et al., 2012). For example, most YP had significant mental health difficulties at the beginning of their residence and felt highly anxious when they first arrived in SA. To minimise psychological distress upon arrival, YP's basic physical and psychological needs should be met first and foremost (Maslow, 1943). This holds implications for procedures such as the induction policy for new residents; upon arrival YP should have opportunity to eat, wash, rest in their own safe space, and have a method of contacting people (such as access to a phone). These basic needs should be met before YP are required to complete paperwork or expected to learn new information. When YP are ready to learn new information, EPs would be well placed to help SWs to differentiate learning activities and content for YP who have additional needs.

SWs felt that a trusting relationship with YP enabled more open and honest person-centred planning. YP in my research emphasised that setting goals was extremely important for enabling them to achieve positive outcomes, therefore, YP need to feel safe with their SW so that goal setting is most effective. Ideally, YP will have built a trusting relationship with their SW before they engage in person centred planning, however, if this is not possible, YP's personal goals and plans need to be regularly reviewed together as relationships grow over time.

***Promoting a Hopeful Message by Empowering Young People to Share Their Stories***

It was apparent that the more accepting YP were of their past, the more confident they came across in the interview. Norman (2015) highlights that there can be unhelpful stereotypes in society which create negative narratives for YPEH. YP highlighted that these stereotypes can become self-fulfilling. Therefore, EPs could play an important role in helping YP to construct more positive narratives focussed on their strengths and achievements, and their future aspirations. EPs should also emphasise to schools the importance of directing YP towards role models, as stipulated in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014).

EPs should also play a role in helping society to construct more positive perceptions of YPEH. As a researcher, listening to YP was powerful and inspiring, they spoke with pride, passion, and sometimes frustration particularly around their school experiences. The various YP I interviewed wanted to actively help others by sharing their story. EPs could provide opportunities for YP to share their experiences with schools, to inspire staff to provide the support that was missing for them during their education. Some YP may be willing to support the delivery of EP training or pre-record their story to share during training. Whilst a high level of ethical consideration would need to take place, hearing YP's authentic voice through approaches such as video can be powerful (Giles & Rowley, 2020).

EPs should support youth homelessness organisations to break negative societal stereotypes. Initiatives such as opening hostel doors to the public and giving YP opportunity to share their story can be effective (Hines et al., 2015). One homelessness organisation is developing a peer mentoring service so that ex residents can support current residents by sharing their experiences and by providing psychologically informed intervention, training and advocacy (Rhodes, 2016). Since some of my interviewees were eager to return to SA either as an employee or volunteer, EPs could support homelessness organisations to create such opportunities for ex residents.

An important part of empowering and enabling YP to achieve their aspirations is removing barriers. The key barriers raised in the current research were that YP

who are estranged from their family are financially disadvantaged compared to their peers who are care leavers. The welfare system places estranged YP living in SA in a position where they have little or no financial incentive to work. YP and SWs' voices need to be heard in relation to this, and their suggested changes considered (p. 91; p. 122).

### ***Building Young People's Support Networks***

Building support networks is crucial for supporting mental health. Many YP do not feel that they can talk to someone about their feelings, or ask for help when needed (Mental Health Foundation, 2019). YP value genuine emotion and warmth from professionals (Jane, 2010). This was reflected in the current research. In addition to this, YP talked about the huge impact that SWs had as role models, friends, and someone who believed in them. In line with research by Quilgars, Johnsen and Pleace (2008), the current research suggests that the success of service provision is dependent on positive relationships and a person centred approach. Similarly, Gergen (2011) highlights that relationships precede action, and reflective of this, YP in the current study provided examples of how their thoughts, feelings and behaviour changed as a result of the positive and genuine relationships that they built with their support worker.

Positive relationships are also a key determinant of resilience (Hart et al., 2007) and so it is likely that the positive relationships that YP had with their SWs played a key role in building resilience. EPs could build upon this by providing SWs with training on how to build resilience through protective factors, using a framework such as the resilience matrix (Daniel et al., 2011).

In the literature review I discussed how corporate parenting aims to provide care leavers with the type of support that good parents would provide for their child (Dixon et al., 2015). My findings suggest that in reality, for some YP there are barriers to this support, particularly with regards to time and resources. It is crucial that professionals are not made to work beyond their capacity. Positive and trusting relationships were a key turning point for the YP in my study. There needs to be more money, resources and multi-agency planning targeted at

ensuring that all YPEH have at least one key, consistent trusted adult who is available to mentor and emotionally support them.

Several YP stated how important it was to reconnect with people from their past. EPs working with YPEH could help them to build upon their support network, asking questions such as “who has been a positive influence on you in your past, who do you trust, who would you like to reconnect with?”. Simon (2008) found that compared to care leavers, YP experiencing family estrangement were more likely to become homeless due to less available support. It will be important, therefore, that intervention is targeted towards this population.

The Mental Health Foundation (2019) found that over one in five YP say that their accommodation has a negative effect on their mental health. The YP who I interviewed highlighted factors that create a positive environment, such as art, community, social and sports activities, as well as the challenges of housing YP with complex needs together. EPs could support homelessness organisations to consider these factors when creating a PIE (Haigh et al., 2012).

Finally, SWs also commented upon the importance of their own support network, in terms of working within a supportive team. EPs could support youth homelessness organisations to ensure that teamwork and effective communication is a key priority.

When promoting the EP role to large scale commissioners, it is important that EPs make their relevant skills tangible (Lee & Woods, 2017). This research could help inform a brochure on what support EPs can offer to youth homelessness organisations.

## **Limitations and future research**

### ***Selection Bias***

SWs were asked to contact any ex-residents who they knew or thought were currently in EET. Those who made a lasting impression or maintained

communication may have been most likely to be contacted. Furthermore, the likelihood of YP agreeing to take part may have been influenced by their relationship with the SW. These factors may potentially have increased the emphasis on relationships in the findings. This could be explored through follow up written questionnaires at set time intervals for randomly selected YP who have moved on. This method may additionally be more inclusive for YPEH who feel uncomfortable in a typical interview context.

### ***Generalisability***

Since this research was conducted within one county council in England, it is acknowledged that the findings may not be widely generalisable. However, since the current research is underpinned by social constructionist epistemology, it aims to be exploratory rather than generalisable. The findings are likely to be most relevant to the participants and services involved in the research; feeding back the findings to the YP, homelessness prevention organisation and EP service involved will be an important outcome of this research.

Future research could consider virtual interviews to enable participation of a wider range of YP, particularly in the current context of the pandemic. Enabling YP to take part from home may also help to reduce practical barriers to participation, such as travel, and emotional barriers such as anxiety.

This research represents a snapshot in time and provides insight into what promotes positive outcomes in young adults who previously experienced homelessness. Future research could conduct interviews with older adults who experienced youth homelessness, to explore what helped them to sustain positive outcomes over a longer period. That may, however, be limited by their ability or desire to accurately recall experiences from their past. To overcome this, following a cohort of YP using a longitudinal design could help shed light on both what helps YP to achieve positive outcomes in the short term and what helps them to sustain positive outcomes throughout their lifetime.

## **Final reflections**

In conclusion, I come away from this research with a deeper motivation and understanding around how EPs can help to prevent homelessness through their work in schools and the community, particularly by influencing systems around the child. This research journey has given me an even greater desire to work within a youth homelessness organisation, or in a similar community setting. It has shaped the type of EP that I aspire to be within a youth homelessness organisation; someone who highlights and builds upon positive practice, observes with curiosity, and shares psychology using a flexible yet consistent approach in response to the spontaneous nature of the SW role. Most importantly, building supportive and trusting relationships with both YP and SWs will remain central to my practice. I anticipate that this aspiration will continue to evolve as I gain experience and continually seek feedback on my practice.

I plan to share the current findings through delivering training and initiating dialogue around this topic with colleagues and school staff. Meeting each of the six YP had both a personal and professional impact on me; their insight, determination and willingness to share both their successes and difficulties was admirable. I felt privileged to hear their stories first-hand; and I hope that sharing their stories will inspire others, promote hope and create positive change for YP in the future.

## **Addendum**

### **Youth Homelessness and the Current Pandemic**

At the time of writing this thesis, the country was under lockdown due to covid-19. Recent reports are suggesting that the numbers of PEH may increase due to the pandemic (BBC news, 2020). In light of this, research into supporting YP out of homelessness is increasingly important.

The pandemic could make YP more vulnerable to becoming homeless for a number of reasons. Firstly, lockdown may place additional pressures on families, leading to more relationship breakdowns. Sofa surfing could become

impossible especially if members of the household are shielding and the YP is a key worker. Whilst the government have housed PEH during lockdown, those who are not considered priority need, may well find themselves homeless again after this temporary arrangement (Buchanan, 2020).

YP in the current study had high aspirations and wanted to climb the social ladder in terms of education and employment. What struck me was the barriers they faced, from their additional needs and behaviour being misunderstood and unsupported in school, impacting their inclusion and attainment, to the current welfare system making it almost impossible to gain fulltime paid employment whilst living in SA. The EP role in promoting social justice is a key topic in current research (Schulze et al., 2019). Schulze et al. (2019) found that EPs wanted to commit to promoting social justice, however, they were concerned that social justice was not prioritised in the wider profession. Given that coronavirus has highlighted social injustice (Warren, 2020), and exacerbated the issue (Bambra et al., 2020; Blundell et al., 2020; Rimmer, 2020) this topic should arguably be at the top of the EP agenda, as we reconsider our role in light of the pandemic.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Certificate of Ethical Approval



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus  
Heavitree Road  
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

### CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Youth Homelessness and the role of the Educational Psychologist

Researcher(s) name: Poppy Lopez

Supervisor(s): Andrew Richards, Chris Boyle and Liz Hampton

This project has been approved for the period

From: 14/02/2019

To: 31/08/2020

Ethics Committee approval reference: D1819-020

Signature:  Date: 14/02/2019  
(Professor Justin Dillon, Professor of Science and Environmental Education, Ethics Officer)

## **Appendix B: Feedback from Young People and Support Workers**

### ***Feedback from Young People***

One of my goals for this research was for the interviews to be a positive and encouraging experience for the YP. A key purpose of the pilot interviews was to gain YP's views on how to make the experience positive. I discussed in the methodology chapter how the two pilots shaped the six main interviews.

Most YP were surprised and pleased that their support worker had invited them to take part. Interestingly, despite the incredible obstacles that these YP had overcome and the progress they have made, some YP could not believe that they were considered 'a success story'. I hope that this process gave interviewees a sense of pride and recognition of their achievements.

Before/after the interview, I noticed that the YP took the opportunity to 'catch up' with staff, demonstrating their continued positive relationship. YP reported that it was good holding the interview at SA for this reason, and because they felt on safe and familiar territory. I was unfamiliar with the building and the staff; I felt that this helped to balance out power roles to some degree.

At the end of each interview, I fed back to each YP the strengths I had noticed; they also identified some unexpected strengths in themselves. All interviews had a positive ending. For example, one YP liked drawing but had lost confidence through lack of recent practice. At the beginning of the interview he was less confident with his ability to draw, but by the end was pleased with his drawing. The table below captures YP's feedback at the end of each interview.

Me: . . . I've noticed that you are so easy to talk to, you have lots of good ideas, so friendly and easy going, thank you so much I'm sure it will help to help other young people.

P: thank you. You know what I was saying about my drawing and stuff, I used to draw things and think I can't think of anything else to draw now, but I'd come back to it, some of the pages took a long time to do, I used to have a good mind like that.

Me: I'm glad you've been able to use your talent again today. How does it make you feel looking at back then, now, and future?

P: I thought I wouldn't be able to do it . . .  
. . . It's nice to go over where I was and where I am today. . .  
. . . I'll show my mum (the drawing), she'll be impressed with that. . .

Me: . . . one day when I have written up my thesis it will be available online, you've given me your email so I will send it to you, but it should also be in an academic journal one day . . .

P: Nice, so I could be famous!

Me: Yes! Except it won't have your name on it (laughs)

P: Well if it comes to being a famous person over this then I'm pretty sure I can write my name on there somewhere! (laughs)

Me: (laughs) well thank you so much.

P: I think this is helping me quite a bit, because it's good to talk to people, you think of all the things while you are at it, that can really help. . . it kind of shifts what I am going to do next . . . I just keep thinking about my goals . . .

Me: I really hope that this research will inspire other YP to have the success that you have had.

P: yeh I hope so too, I didn't realise it was like this but I've enjoyed it this is what I want to do as a support worker – make a difference to people's lives, whether that's by telling them how shit my life was and coming through the other side, because when you hear people have done well coming from the same background as you, it's reassuring.

P: Hope it was helpful. I didn't know what to expect, it does feel good that I was chosen to do this . . . it means that Becky (support worker) thinks I've done well, so that's her once again being considerate.

Me: It's down to everything you've achieved and put your mind to.

P: Well, she was a big help. It was lovely meeting you, bye!

Me: How did you find it?

P█: It was awesome! Lovely to be able to sit and vent for a little bit if I'm honest with you, cos I don't get to talk to many people anymore cos I literally get stuck to my children like glue so I don't get to converse or nothing, so just getting to sit down and chat shit for an hour and a half is lovely, especially when I get to sit and chat shit about myself I love it!!

Me: I'm glad you've enjoyed it.

P█: Yeh no honestly it has been an experience, I'm quite happy with what we've got through to be fair.

Me: Is there anything that could have made it better?

P█: More drawing! Offer more pens and pencils (he looked around the room for the paintings he did while he was here). We all used to sit down and paint and draw, it was absolutely lovely.

P█: I'm genuinely a success from here, that's what I find funny as hell, I never thought I'd be a success . . .

Me: How did you find this interview?

P█: Alright, I could probably do this sort of thing more often, retrospect. It's kind of reassured me that I am on a path somewhere. . . It's been nice talking to you.

### ***Feedback from Support Workers***

Support workers fed back that they enjoyed getting in touch with YP inviting them to take part, as it provided an opportunity for celebrating when things do go well, which is so important but sometimes easy to miss in a busy, fast paced job. Other support workers fed back that the focus group discussion was helpful and encouraging because it gave them opportunity to reflect on success stories, learn from them and share best practice with their support worker colleagues who work in different teams.

## **Appendix C: Examples of Interview Activity**

YP took different approaches to the task; some preferred a more structured approach with boxes and writing (see first image), whilst others took the opportunity to express their journey through drawing (see second image).

*[This image has been removed by the author of this thesis to help protect participant anonymity]*

## Appendix D: Invitation for Young People



### Invitation

**Are you aged between 16-25?  
Are you living independently and in education, employment or training?  
I would love to hear from you!**

My name is Poppy Lopez. I am doing research about young people like you who have previously stayed at [REDACTED]

The purpose of this research is to explore what helps young people to overcome homelessness and have positive outcomes. Your views could help change things for other young people in the future.

**As a thank you for taking part, I can offer you a £15 amazon voucher.**

#### **Why would I like to meet you?**

Since this research is all about young people like you, your opinions and experiences are very important. There are no right or wrong answers, I am just interested to know what you think.

#### **What would taking part involve?**

If you agree to take part, I would like to meet with you for about an hour at [REDACTED] building (whichever one is easiest for you to get to). We may do some drawing and have a conversation so that I can get to know a bit about you. Don't worry if you don't like drawing – I can do that bit if you like! We will talk about different topics, such as your time at the [REDACTED] what you are doing now, what school was like, what has gone well in your life so far, what /who has helped you, and your hopes for the future. You don't need to prepare anything – just bring yourself!

One of the most important things is that you have an opportunity to share the positives and celebrate what's gone well in your life so far.

I will do my best to help you to feel comfortable. During the interview, you can skip questions or stop at any point. You don't even have to give a reason.

#### **Could you meet me?**

If you would like to take part in this research, or find out further information, please email me on [REDACTED] or call/text me on [REDACTED]

Thank you for your interest,

I look forward to meeting you!

Poppy

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## Appendix E: Semi Structured Interview Guide: Young People

### Interview with Young People

Introductions /participant information/ confidentiality/ consent/rapport building.

Explain anonymity – although most people reading the research won't know who you are, it may be possible for people who know you well, for example, your support worker, to work out who you are.

*“No right or wrong answers, you are the expert . . . I want to understand your opinions and what you think”*

Before starting, explain activity and four sections of P4A as drawn out on paper. Ask if they would like to draw/ if drawing helps them. If YP doesn't want to draw/annotate, offer to do it for them or leave drawing out altogether. Have picture cards on table as prompts if needed.

#### **Follow up/prompt using four key areas of P4A throughout interview:**

- *Friends, relationships and community*
- *Employment*
- *Independent living*
- *Health (mental and physical)*

<https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/>

Research question	Guiding questions	Possible follow ups	Prompts
What has helped YP to achieve positive outcomes?	Tell me about yourself now  How would you draw yourself now?	What's important to you?  Tell me about your drawing  What is/isn't going well?  Tell me about . . . ( <i>address four key P4A areas</i> )  What have you achieved/ are you proud	Ok . . . that's interesting . . . anything else?  Looks . . . personality . . . interests . . . values.  . . . How about . . . and . . . can you tell me more about . . .  . . . why is that important to you?

	<p>Tell me about when you first came to the supported accommodation.</p>	<p>of (<i>address four key areas</i>)</p> <p>What brought you there? When?</p>	<p>Anything else?</p>
	<p>How would you draw yourself then?</p>	<p>What was/wasn't going well?</p> <p>What were you thinking/feeling?</p> <p>What did you want/need help with at the time?</p> <p>Have you ever considered yourself 'homeless'?</p> <p>What does homelessness mean to you?</p>	<p>Anything else?</p> <p>What/ who helped? Did you get the help you needed?</p>
	<p>Tell me about . . . . (<i>address four key areas</i>) at the time</p>	<p><i>Spend some time summarising/ comparing then vs now</i></p>	<p>How do you feel about that?</p>
	<p>How does your life now compare to then? What's changed?</p>	<p>What /who helped things to go well? <i>(prompt reflection around individual vs systemic factors)</i></p>	<p>Can you tell me more?</p> <p>When . . . (add any events to timeline)</p>
	<p>What led to those changes?</p> <p>What/who made a difference?</p>	<p>Was there a turning point for you?</p>	<p>How, who, when, what did they do that helped . . .</p>

	<p><i>Note: Skip to educational experiences</i></p> <p>How do you feel about the future?</p> <p>Do you have goals for the future? (4 key areas).</p> <p>How will you reach those goals?</p> <p>Why do you think some YP don't have positive outcomes?</p> <p>What do you think would help YP who become homeless?</p>	<p>Is there anything that you/people in school/ college/family/ society should/could have done differently?</p> <p>Can you draw your ideal future self?</p> <p>How/ what made you decide on these goals?</p> <p>Do you need support?</p> <p>How confident are you that you can reach your goals?</p> <p>What advice do you have for YP who are homeless?</p>	<p>What makes a good support worker?</p> <p>Did anything about you/ inside of you change? When? Did anyone else see? What else was happening at the time? Who/what influenced you?</p>
How do YP describe their			

<p>school/educational experiences?</p>	<p>Tell me about what school was like for you.</p> <p>Could things have been different/better for you in school/ college?</p> <p>Primary vs secondary?</p> <p>What else was happening for you at the time?</p> <p>Have you ever heard of /met an educational psychologist?</p> <p><i>Note: go back to questions about the future.</i></p>	<p>What did you like/dislike?</p> <p>Was anyone important to you?</p> <p>Did you ever need help? Did anyone support you?</p> <p>Would you do anything differently if you could go back to school?</p> <p>What could other people have done differently?</p> <p>If you had a magic wand, tell me one thing you would have changed about school.</p> <p>What do you think an educational psychologist does?</p>	<p>Social life . . . work . . .</p> <p>What did you think/feel/do?</p> <p>Who? Why?</p> <p>How?</p> <p>What else?</p> <p>Why is that important?</p> <p>Any ideas?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that . . . your experience . . .</p> <p>.</p>
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## Appendix F: Semi Structured Focus Group Guide: Support Workers

Research Question	Guiding questions	Possible follow up questions	Prompts
<p>What enables staff to do the job well?</p>	<p>Tell me about your role</p> <p>What makes a good support worker?</p> <p>Any challenges?</p> <p>Do you feel able to overcome those challenges?</p> <p>What do you know about the EP role?</p>	<p>What motivates you to do the job?</p> <p>What do they do? How?</p> <p>What else?</p> <p>Examples? When do /don't you feel competent?</p> <p>How? Who/ what could help?</p> <p>Has anyone had any success overcoming these challenges in the past?</p> <p>Have you worked with an EP?</p> <p>How have you found this?</p> <p>Do you need any further support /training to be the best that you can be?</p>	<p>Any examples?</p> <p>Does anyone agree/disagree?</p> <p>Does anyone else have an opinion?</p>

	What do you understand by the term PIE (psychologically informed environments)		
What do support workers feel leads to positive outcomes in YP?	<p>Tell me about when things have gone well.</p> <p>What do you mean by positive outcomes?</p> <p>In terms of . . .</p> <p>Community inclusion?</p> <p>Health?</p> <p>Independent living?</p> <p>Engagement in Education/employment?</p> <p>Do staff feel well equipped to support these areas?</p> <p>Why do you think some YP don't have positive outcomes?</p> <p>How could we help more YP to have positive outcomes?</p>	<p>Success stories?</p> <p>What helped these YP to achieve this?</p> <p>What support makes a difference in supported accommodation?</p> <p>What did the YP do, support workers do etc.</p> <p>Is there anything that could have been done to help these YP earlier?</p> <p>What are the barriers, how could we help YP</p>	

	<p>What enables a successful transition from SA into the community?</p> <p>Do you know how YP are getting on once they have left SA?</p> <p>Is any further support needed to sustain positive outcomes/ reach their goals?</p>	<p>to overcome these?</p> <p>How do you know when YP are ready to leave SA?</p> <p>How do you prepare them to leave?</p> <p>Does the relationship end? What is the best way to end the relationship?</p> <p>How many return – what is the nature of the return?</p> <p>What kind of support? who provides this? Are there any gaps in support or resources?</p>	
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Is there anything else that you would like to add that you feel we haven't covered?

Closure

## Appendix G: Young People's Definitions of Homelessness

People say you don't have a home. But to me it's more than that. Where you live you can make a home out of it, whether it's in a fucking box on the streets, wherever. Homelessness is . . . you're lonely, you don't have anything in life, you genuinely don't have anything, um, I think its misjudged a lot as well, everyone thinks that homeless people are scumbags that must be on the streets because they have a drug addiction. Or they're alcoholics, don't give them money to help them. But it's more than that. It's a lot more than that. It's just people like everyone else who haven't had the easiest start or the easiest ending – something has gone wrong in their life, but it may not be their fault, I think they are very misjudged for that.

It's not necessarily not having a home, it's not being fulfilled, it's not having anywhere to go. Even people on the streets now have people's houses they can go to, they can stay on the sofas, that's not homeless. Cos as long as you have a friend who you can stay on their couch a couple of nights, work something out after, you are not homeless. Myself, I was put in a situation where I was actually on the street, no friends to go to, I had fallen out with my family . . . that's homeless, that's proper homeless. Scary is the main word, you don't know if you will make it til the next morning, hypothermia, starvation and getting stabbed. That's your three main worries and you can't sleep.

It means you have nowhere to stay. I don't exactly count this as homeless but sofa surfing, you know where you are sleeping at your friend's house for a weekend, then move on to someone else's house for three days, I don't count that as homeless cos you are indoors, you obviously don't live there but you still got a bed, you still got a roof over your head. Homelessness for me personally is outdoors, you know, sleeping rough, sleeping on a bench that's what I see as being homeless cos I know a lot of people say 'ah I got nowhere

to live, I'm homeless n that (frustrated tone of voice) sorry, I just can't handle it sometimes, but yeh they go on about they are homeless but they are actually living kind of at someone's house.

Me:

Ah, you can't handle it when people say that . . .

Nah, homelessness is being out on the streets, it's not nice whatsoever . . . I was out on the streets Christmas before last, it was cold, it was cold at that stage, it was horrible.

Hmmmmm . . . not having somewhere to sleep, I guess, roof over your head situation. My home was a tent for years. A tent that I could move anywhere. . . We were homeless for ages and ages. But we were always staying at people's houses and that so also not homeless as well, it was just the way that we lived.

On the street. Like these people who say they are homeless but still sofa surfing with their friends and stuff, no I don't think that is.

Me:

Have you ever considered yourself homeless?

Err yeh, I did have a roof over my head, but I didn't have anywhere to call home. Whilst I was in hospital, whilst I was unsure about what was going to happen to me. I was homeless at that point.

## Appendix H: Example Codes and Themes: Young People

<b>Theme: relationships</b>		
<b>Subtheme</b> learning from parents/carers	<b>Subtheme</b> reconnections	<b>Subtheme</b> key people who care
<b>codes</b>	<b>codes</b>	<b>codes</b>
Positive parental influence (e.g. on interests, values)	Getting back in touch with good friends	Support workers “like a parent”
Learning from parents’ difficulties	Happy to reconnect with family members	Substance use = distancing from key people
	Reconnection leading to romantic relationship	Key friends/family are there in times of desperation (e.g. sister, grandparent)
	Wanting to reconnect with trusted professionals from the past	

## Appendix I: Example Quotes and Corresponding Codes: Young People

<b>Subtheme: reconnecting with positive influences from the past</b>	
<b>Code</b>	<b>Example quotes</b>
Getting back in touch with good friends	<p>P█: . . . all I wanted to do was go out and back then they were the only friends I had so I didn't properly go out until I was clean, and by that point, I was finding new friends, sensible friends only (laughs) on Friday and Saturday drinking friends. . . .They were old friends of mine from primary and secondary school and college, I'd just lost contact with all of them, it was more because I was into drugs, they weren't into it so obviously I had to find new friends to do it with. So, kind of just separated, then they found out I was clean and that, just drunk so we started hanging out . . .</p> <p>Me: How did you meet your friends?</p> <p>P█: One from X school, others from back when I was travelling, I've gotten back in contact with them now . . .</p>
Happy to reconnect with family members	<p>Me: Who's important to you?</p> <p>P█: My boyfriend, my dad, my dad's really important like he's only just come back in my life after 10 years. . . it's like we've never been apart . . . I went a bit mad on him for Father's Day cos it was the first one in so many years . . .</p> <p>P█: My grandparents place was in X and it was pretty much stop by say hello and move on to next place, I knew them but not a lot, I know them a lot more now cos I live near them and I can talk to them about their past and other stuff.</p> <p>P█: at this point I was going around there, I was involved with the family again.</p>

<p>Reconnection leading to romantic relationship</p>	<p>P█: . . . as soon as I moved here X texted me (boyfriend) it's a funny story, when I was like 14 he was a year or two above me and he kept messaging me asking to meet, I kept pieing him I'd never turn up. When I moved back, he kept doing the same. So, this time I was like well I'm older now, I've got nothing to lose . . . we spent that night together and we have spent every night together since . . .</p>
<p>Wanting to reconnect with trusted professionals from the past</p>	<p>P█: . . . both her (leaving care worker) and the social workers said I could keep in contact but I have lost their numbers so I can't get hold of them. And my leaving care worker can pass the message onto them and they can get hold of me but obviously my leaving care worker isn't allowed to give me their numbers, so that's frustrating . . .</p> <p>P█: Their (support workers) smile when I came around the corner - it's an amazing experience to be able to move out of something like this and come back and just be so welcomed, that's what I mean by its care, I see Becky (support worker) out and about all the time, she will stop and say "how's your children, it's so good to see you" (said with enthusiasm). It's rewarding to know that I've got people like that who genuinely know me, let alone care for me.</p>

## Appendix J: Feedback from Educational Psychologists

Feedback from EPs suggests that a space for group discussion around the topic of youth homelessness was valuable CPD.

Me: Have you taken anything from this group, or might it affect your practice in any way?

EP5: I think maybe my definition of homelessness and thinking about what it could mean to different people

EP4: I think it has just made me more mindful about my own practice and particularly not just wanting to be another “crappy meeting” (all agree) which kind of really hit me, really

EP2: I think in some ways it highlights some of the constraints that we work within and the barriers and the systems that we work I suspect we've all got brilliant ideas about what we could do but we can't until systems change and those barriers are removed, it really does feel like it's almost an impossible job I don't know if that's a depressing thought or not – but that's how it sometimes feels that actually until we start to see some real – because we have to account for every minute of our day – maybe through some of my professional development maybe there's something there, but . . . I think we could do some brilliant work just not the way things are currently its very tricky.

EP3: I think there is positive in it, in that all these stories, hanging onto the fact that they are success stories and it's one person that has made the difference so if we can influence just one relationship then it can make a difference.

EP2: and we may have prevented several people from homelessness over the years and you just wouldn't know would you?!

EP6: it's made me think about the importance of developing our impact at systemic levels and my personal thing would be what are the best ways of doing that and how can I get better at doing that I think, but some of it is maximising opportunities for it to happen to that would be my take away.

EP7 (via email):

. . . I thought it was great to be part of and discuss an important topic amongst colleagues – a very worthwhile use of time . . . The parts that I have continued to think about over the week have been about how young people see 'meetings' (“just another crap meeting”) – I have been wondering how this would change my practice and might try out some different ways of working later today when I meet with a YP. Also, about how some YP see adults in school (not liking them etc) – I am still considering how EPs could bring about change in these experiences.

You did a fantastic job of allowing us all to discuss, listening and eliciting deeper thinking and moving on when appropriate, without it feeling

rushed – you are very skilled in listening, facilitating and generally being a psychologist. I felt it was so powerful to hear the YP’s stories, and hopefully for them as well.

### **Appendix K: Semi Structured Focus Group Guide: Educational Psychologists**

Resources: question prompt cards, vignettes.

Introduction: Briefly outline my research and the purpose of the focus group. Outline key points on consent form and allow time for EPs to read/sign/ask questions.

*This is a new area of research so please say whatever comes to mind, there are no wrong or right answers. The purpose of a focus group is to share ideas, build on people’s ideas and suggest different perspectives.*

*Due to the sensitive nature of these vignettes, please can you keep the details within the group and hand back the vignettes afterwards.*

**Opening questions:**

Briefly describe your previous experiences of working with homeless YP (if any)?

How would you know if a YP is homeless?

How do you define homelessness?

What is the current EP role in

**Guiding questions about vignettes:**

What are your initial responses to the vignettes? What stands out?

What can we learn from these 'success stories' and 'what helped'?

Could homelessness have been prevented?

Could EPs have supported these YP? How/when?

What intervention could EPs provide at an individual AND systemic level?

Questions about the EP role:

<sup>1</sup> What skills/knowledge/psychological theory/experience could EPs bring?

<sup>2</sup> How could the current EP role in  be developed?

<sup>3</sup> Are there any current/anticipated challenges/barriers to EP work in this area? How could these be overcome?

<sup>4</sup> Is there anything that you will take from this focus group into your practice?

## Appendix L: Example Vignette

EPs were presented with a vignette for each young person, summarising their background, education, time in SA, current situation, what helped, and future plans. The following vignette combines sections from different YP's stories. I have combined sections rather than presenting six complete vignettes, to help protect participants anonymity.

### Background

I experienced significant adversity and trauma throughout my childhood, including physical abuse, parental substance abuse and consequently parental death. I never went into care. I became homeless due to family relationship breakdown and moved in with a friend. I didn't want to "take them for a mug any longer" so left and slept in an abandoned factory before moving to SA.

### Education

I struggled with school "Education is a very set system, and I don't do very well with rules". I have dyslexia . . . "my (English) teacher called me out all the time, picked on me to read, I'd stand there in front of the class stuttering, getting laughed at and literally I threw my book at the teacher at one point . . . It's been pulled up now that I've probably got ADHD . . . but I wasn't listened to very much in school . . . none of the teachers wanted to work with me, I can't remember a single teacher that genuinely cared about me . . . I feel like a lot of children are pushed into a situation where they basically have to just keep quiet, sit, deal with their own issues . . . it's not schools problem . . . teachers need to be taking more initiative and becoming more personal with the children in their class . . . They just want their money and to leave". The only positive memory of school was the behaviour support TA, she was really nice. She let me go for nap when I had a headache. She bought me lunch when there wasn't any food at home. I got expelled a couple of times but didn't get kicked out.

### Experience of SA

"I was looking for work and I got told ah you will have to pay £250 (rent) I thought ah I'd rather not bother then I'd rather just stick with the 60 quid (rent a month)." Other residents didn't work because they had no energy or effort to go out and get work, but I think it was more because if they had work, they knew they would have to pay more (towards rent).

I liked the staff in SA but don't think it's a helpful place to be when you are trying to get clean because "all you do is smell the crap and when you are trying to get off it it's hard. There are a lot of drug dealers n stuff in here . . . they don't really care, they still have family, my family were not putting up with that stuff, so I had to make a change". My support worker could see that I wanted to change so she gave me extra help.

### Now

I've returned to college to study psychology, my mental health is more settled, and I plan to go to university. I live in my own a flat, I'm not really in touch with my family.

### What helped

I am resilient, determined and good at adjusting. Going to college helped me get used to being around people; when peers complimented my artwork, it boosted my confidence. "Supported Accommodation got me a (English) tutor . . . she comes over we chat we read, I've gotten used to her so I don't tear up as much when I try to read stuff in front of her. My support worker helped me get gold banded and continues to help with reading letters. I've always had a positive relationship with my grandparents and enjoy seeing them more often now. Having a positive mindset, making a plan and breaking it down into small steps helps me to succeed.

### **Future**

Ideally, I want to go to university and into a health care profession but "I know I couldn't do it, it just worries me that the stuff won't go in, it's not that I don't want to learn". I might look into doing a more practice-based option, like an apprenticeship.

### **Appendix M: Example from transcript (interview with young person)**

Me: what is it that's really good about X (support worker)?

Interviewee: I get so upset thinking about X (support worker) because uh I just love her so much; she is just so good at her job. Before I lived in SA I didn't know what I wanted to be and then X came and I was like I want to be a support worker she changed my life, me feeling how I feel now is down to X because if I had any other support worker god knows how it would of went. Honestly I don't know what it is, she was always so understanding but wasn't . . . she just had good banter it didn't make you feel like she's the boss, she was just like that person she chilled with us she was cool she wasn't embarrassing she was just one of those people who you thought I'd actually chill with you out of, like where I live and she just made you feel safe and she was just the most understanding person ever.

Me: what inspired you so much about X?

Interviewee: she changed my life in so many ways, I want to be a support worker here with vulnerable young adults, but I'm a support worker now (in another sector) but it's still a support worker and I wouldn't have had a clue what a support worker is before X. So, I wouldn't have had the aspiration to work here. So, she put me down a career path like, that was it as soon as that happened I was like I want to be a support worker.

Me: it sounds like she is a really important role model for you

Interviewee: she is one of my biggest role models

Me: what do you think you will do to be like her when you are a support worker?

Interviewee: I don't know I think she's got something that I don't think anyone could beat. Like she is just so good at her job, I can't say how because, don't know, you have to know X to know she has just got it down to a T this job.

Me: if you had to describe her in three words?

Interviewee: does life changing class as one? She is hard working; she is so hard working.

Me: yeh, how do you know?

Interviewee: cos she is always in the office, always at the computer even if she is writing up a record for someone or massive report she will always have time even if it's the most petty thing, like I could be there like "my boyfriend isn't replying I feel like shit" and she'd drop whatever she was doing would be like "alright well here are some things you can do", or like distract yourself or she would just be like that best friend you need . . .