

New research reveals increasing levels of youth homelessness in Aylesbury Vale and urgent need for temporary emergency accommodation hosts

[14th December 2021]: Local charity Youth Concern today launches a report into youth homelessness among young people in Aylesbury Vale and recommendations for its 'Nightstop' service which provides emergency overnight accommodation for 16-25 years olds who are facing a night in an unsafe place.

The report is being launched by the Rt Hon Sir David Lidington KCB CBE (Former UK Cabinet Minister and MP), Cllr Steven Lambert (Opposition Leader and Councillor for Aylesbury West, Non-Executive Director of the Vale of Aylesbury Housing and Youth Concern trustee), the Youth Concern team including CEO Hannah Asquith, and Maja who benefitted from Nightstop Aylesbury whilst homeless.

Key findings from the research* include

- Compared to the national average, Aylesbury Vale has 22% more young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- In 2019, 330 young people aged 16-24 identified themselves as homeless or at risk of homelessness in Aylesbury Vale. This represents a 66% increase on 2018 (199 young people)
- Many issues cause under 25s to identify themselves as homeless. Sexual and domestic abuse, racially motivated violence or harassment, substance misuse issues and, by far the most common, mental health problems
- 'Sofa surfing' at friends or with family members is the most common form of youth homelessness. 100% of questionnaire respondents had 'sofa surfed' at friends' or with family members: 30% had slept rough, 20% had slept in strangers' homes, and 10% in a car, in a bus station and in a drug dealer's house.

The report makes 4 key recommendations for improving its Nightstop emergency accommodation service to support more young people in need:

1. **Strengthen** partnerships with existing and potential local referral organisations including Buckinghamshire Council, Jobcentre Plus, other voluntary services, schools and colleges.
2. **Recruit** more Nightstop hosts in Aylesbury Vale, especially hosts of colour.
3. **Increase** the amount of time Nightstop Aylesbury guests can stay with their hosts from 3 nights to a maximum of 4 weeks.
4. **Explore** supported lodgings for young people needing more than 4 weeks' accommodation.

Hannah Asquith, CEO of Youth Concern says: “When we think about homelessness, we usually picture someone sleeping rough, in an underpass or by a train station. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. We don’t know the true extent of hidden homelessness, people living in temporary and precarious accommodation. And we don’t often think about teenagers and young adults without a safe bed. This report reveals the shocking extent of the youth homelessness crisis here in Aylesbury Vale. We want to raise awareness of Youth Concern’s emergency accommodation service, Nightstop Aylesbury, revamped and reopening in the wake of the pandemic. We want to work with other organisations across the Vale to help young people into safe accommodation. We want to be there for vulnerable young people when they need us most.”

“I spent my first homeless night in a car. It was so cold – it was just before Christmas. I spent another night behind an abandoned building. And I slept on friends’ sofas... until they got tired of me being there. Nightstop Aylesbury was amazing. I stayed with a really nice lady. She asked me if I had any pyjamas. I said I only had the clothes I was wearing. She gave me so much ... When I got a job interview I had clothes that looked professional. I knew I was homeless but I didn’t want to look homeless. Now I have a job, and somewhere good to live. My mental health is better and I’m managing it. I owe so much to Youth Concern.” *Nightstop Aylesbury guest*

“As a family with two young children, we always felt well supported and safe while hosting for Nightstop with Youth Concern”. *Nightstop host*

Councillor Nick Naylor, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services said:

“The report highlights the real challenges for young homeless people in the Aylesbury Vale area. Youth Concern is a long established and valued partner in Buckinghamshire and we will be focusing on the report and looking at ways to work with Youth Concern to address the findings of the work they have done.”

*Youth Concern conducted the research from a freedom of information request to Buckinghamshire Council for 2018 and 2019, invited input from national homeless charities, interviewed two similarly sized Nightstop services, and interviewed ten under 25s from across Aylesbury Vale who have had an experience of homelessness.

About Nightstop Aylesbury

Nightstop Aylesbury has been running since 2012. It helps to tackle youth homelessness by providing emergency overnight accommodation for 16-25 year olds who are facing a night in an unsafe place. It is part of a nationwide response to homelessness co-ordinated by Depaul UK, a national charity for homeless people. Communities and charities run Nightstops in 30 locations around the UK. Youth Concern runs the Nightstop service in Aylesbury Vale. Since 2012 Youth Concern has provided emergency accommodation to 150 young people locally.

Vetted and trained volunteer hosts provide a safe, welcoming place for young people in crisis. They open their homes for up to three nights, offering a private spare room, a hot meal, a shower, washing facilities and a listening ear. Nightstop guests visit Youth Concern's 'Drop-in Centre' in Aylesbury town centre during the day, where youth workers will support them with their myriad needs including mediation with family, counselling, signing up for benefits, completing forms, access to education, employment and training and finding suitable move-on accommodation.

In March 2020 Covid-19 caused a temporary pause to Nightstop Aylesbury which gave Youth Concern the opportunity to undertake research into local need and review the existing Nightstop provision to understand how the service was perceived by young people and how it could be improved to provide even greater levels of support.

About Youth Concern

Youth Concern supports vulnerable 13-25 year olds across Aylesbury Vale. From its base in Aylesbury town centre, the charity's experienced team of staff and volunteers offer a range of services including emotional support, counselling, food and care parcels, advocacy, help with employment, education and training, and practical assistance to deal with homelessness.

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