

PRESS RELEASE

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Thousands of homeless children are growing up in filthy, unsafe, overcrowded accommodation that breaches their basic human rights says new charity report

Children reveal shocking conditions in Bed & Breakfasts (B&Bs) & Temporary Accommodation (TA); thousands housed illegally; children put at risk of sexual exploitation, developing mental and physical health problems and losing their education.

New research with homeless children and young people has revealed a disturbing picture of the impact that being housed illegally in unsuitable and unsafe B&Bs is having on their lives with children talking about being housed in cramped, dirty and unsafe conditions, miles away from school, friends and family.

The ground-breaking research carried out in-depth interviews with homeless children shows they are being left to languish in inadequate accommodation, often for months on end:

'Living in B&B is like serving a prison sentence; I've almost given up hope. I'm 14 and my sister is 11 and we have to share a bed'

Michael, age 14

'My little brother is disabled. The B&B had steps at the entrance but the wheelchair lift was broken. I had to carry him everyday. We were there for six months when I was 16'

Fowzia, now aged 19

'It's so cold at night. Sometimes I have to wear all my layers including my jacket. There is no heating'

Deanna, age 11

'I saw blood on the sheet when we arrived, I pulled the sheet off and the mattress was covered in blood. After a few days me and my dad started itching, we were getting bitten by bed bugs. We told the owner and he said we must've brought them in. I told our social worker but she didn't listen'

Carl 16

'I was in a B&B for 19 weeks when I was 16. I should have been in care. There were lads aged 17, and older men who visited for work or holiday. I was the only girl. I couldn't imagine what the men I was living with would do if I walked in in my school uniform. I felt at risk constantly. One of the men grabbed my ass when he was drunk'

Hannah, now aged 19

Extended periods in this kind of accommodation increases the likelihood that children will be bullied at school, experience mental health problems or physical illness and fall behind in their education. Yet, the last decade has seen huge growth in numbers of children being forced to live in TA, including B&B. Official government statistics show that at the end of 2017, 120,510 homeless children were housed in TA, with 73% (87,320) housed in London. In the last year, numbers of homeless households placed in B&B rose by 10%,

and are now 250% higher than in 2009. At the end of 2017, 2,050 households with children, or headed by a child, were housed in a B&B and of these nearly 45% (900) stayed longer than the six week legal limit.

Change It! Steering Group member Fowzia said:

'In 2016 I spent 6 months living in a B&B with my family. The accommodation was cold, dirty and unsafe; living there damaged my education and left me with anxiety. There was no accessible entrance for my disabled brother, and no where for us to cook. We are still housed in Temporary Accommodation, awaiting a review. We endure indifference and ruthlessness from our local council who demand payments without warning and threaten us with eviction. The Government must take urgent action and implement new laws to guarantee adequate housing for children and families. Measures should be put in place to ensure local authorities comply with the laws on housing instead of neglecting children and families.'

Louise King, Director of the Children's Rights Alliance for England, said:

"It's shocking that in 2018 children are telling us about living in accommodation infested with rats and being forced to share filthy bathrooms with adults they do not know. Bed and Breakfast accommodation is completely unsuitable for children – babies and very young children have nowhere to play, crawl and learn to walk and older children have no privacy and no where to study or socialise with friends. Despite it being illegal to house children in B&Bs for longer than 6 weeks the children we have spoken to have been forced to live there for months on end. The Government must take urgent action to put a stop to this unacceptable situation."

The research has been produced as part of the child-led Change it! campaign, supported by the Children's Rights Alliance for England, part of Just for Kids Law. The campaign steering group is made up of 22 inspirational young people aged eight to twenty years old from across England. Many of the children leading the campaign have experienced homelessness and some of them have spent extended periods growing up in B&Bs.

Change it! is calling on the Government to listen to the voices of children and young people and to take urgent action to ensure local authorities stop breaking the law by housing families in B&Bs for longer than the legal limit by ensuring there is enough suitable housing for children.

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The report is being launched on Wednesday 13th June 2018, 5 - 6pm at an event hosted by Siobhain McDonagh MP in the Houses of Parliament - Jubilee Room. With direct testimony from children in the Change It! campaign steering group and research participants.

Notes to Editors **

1. Change it! is a campaign led by children and young people who are passionate about making life better for all children and young people. It is supported by the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE).

The Change It! Steering Group first came together in 2015 when they researched and wrote the *See it, Say it, Change it* report about children's rights in England as part of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's examination of the UK. In June 2016, the UN Committee made a series of recommendations to the UK Government. An urgent issue picked out by the UN was the need to stop housing children in temporary accommodation, like B&Bs, for long periods of time.

2. The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) is part of the charity Just for Kids Law. It works with over 150 organisational and individual members to promote children's rights. CRAE believes that human rights are a powerful tool in making life better for children and fights for children's rights by listening to what they say, carrying out research to understand what children are going through and using the law to challenge those who violate children's rights.
3. You can read the full report here: http://www.crae.org.uk/media/125719/462614-CRAE_CHANGE-IT-REPORT-Digital-final.pdf
4. For more information visit: www.crae.org.uk

Available for interview:

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Young people: Fowzia (19) on her personal experience of homelessness