

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

SJR(2)-17-06(p.11)

Date: Wednesday 6 December 2006

Time: 09.30am – 12.30pm

Venue: Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Paper to note: Visit to South Wales Forums - Leanne Wood AM

Please note the spelling mistakes are deliberate

As soon as I reached 16 years old all my mothers benefits had stopped and she could no longer have me staying at her home, in the past couple of years I also misbehaved which brought my mother to the end. She put me out and I was placed in the Caeleon House Hotel on 1st September 2006. There was only 2 rooms left there and the one of those rooms which was where I was put in a basement room which was full of damp, the electrical sockets were hanging off the walls. I was only allowed 30 mins in the bathroom, I was never allowed the central heating on and if I went out in the morning I wasn't allowed back into the hotel until 4pm and if I went out after 4pm I wasn't back there until 10pm. I had no support, I did everything by myself, I had to set up my benefits by myself and fill in forms I knew nothing about.

I kept telling Pontypool council that because I was living in Newport and I had no money I couldn't make it to their meetings but they didn't seem to listen to me, I then had a letter saying I was no longer allowed to stay at the Caeleon House Hotel. I had to phone around and get myself a lift to Pontypool council where I had a meeting with 2 homeless officers. They didn't really help me though, they were meant to refer me to social services but they didn't. I was then placed in the Newport Hotel at first everything was fine but then I had a letter from the council saying I was no longer allowed to live at that address because I had made myself intentionally homeless, I then had to get back in touch with my mother for the first time in a few months and ask for her help, we phoned the council and they said it was nothing they could do but to give me a list of direct hostels which were no help because I had to be 17-18 years old.

I then got in touch with a place called HOP which referred me with Sarah from Mediation and Steve from Emphasis which have been trying to help me, they have phoned the council on numerous occasions but they didn't really want to know. I had and still have nowhere to go. Sarah then made a meeting with Gregg from Shelter and he phoned the council and he explained about my mother's money and that she could no longer have me but they still didn't want to know. Steve and Sarah have put in an appeal about my case. My mum took me to social services and they are appalled about how the council have treated me. I now have a meeting with social services on Wednesday but I am still homeless and I am staying over other people's houses which isn't fair. (I also got my things taken from me (I got robbed) and I told the Newport Hotel but they didn't want to know). If the council had

contacted Sarah from Mediation straight away me and my mother could of sorted things out (which were trying to do now) but because they didn't it is now going to take months.

(Homeless Female)

Growing up wasn't a good time for me & social services were involved. By the time I was 15 years old, I was living on the streets. I was on the run from social services because I found that they didn't help me. I was sofa surfing & living in the streets for 2 years. When I was 17 my mate told me about Ystrad Fawr & I declared myself as homeless. I found that this didn't help because they wanted to put me in Bristol. I went back & for, for about six months. They put me in a B+B. I was thrown out of there because I was drinking. While I was on the streets I had a drink & drug problem. After a while they put me in a safe house & I got all my help there.

- I now live in supported housing. It's not easy living on your own even with support as you feel that you need your Family.
- A lot of issues appear – self harming, drinking, drugs & eating problems.

(Caerffili)

- People just think your bad person because you do criminal things and take drugs and drink their look at you as if you just really bad but weren't
- We got load issue and everyday life it hard but I think you need sort your head out but you need some one 2 aswell as you it hard 2 do it yourself everyone need help

Topics to discuss

- Links to the care system
- Drug and alcohol use
- Mental health difficulties
- Experiences at hostels/temporary accommodation
- Money - benefits remain low; training allowance penalises young people?
- Loneliness
- Social Services – lots had negative experiences
- No advocacy - 10 entitlements – young people missing out
- Leaving care at 16 – no-one cares
- Huge caseloads of social workers
- Young people accessing counselling – very difficult to access

What did you do when became homeless?

- Phoned police who called Social Services
- Ran away from places not in my area
- Told teacher – who contacted Llamau
- Most people didn't know what to do when became homeless
- One person knew to go to the council but waited 4 hours to be seen & then placed out of Local

Authority area

Counselling

- Few people had it
- Not widely available
- Need to be ready for it
- Don't understand what counsellors are saying
- Should be available when you need it

Drug/alcohol services

Easier if involved with you?

Mental health

- Went to Whitchurch after overdose. Support has helped me through it
- Drug misuse means that some mental health services won't accept young people into services as they say they don't need it
- Given drugs to block out issues rather than counselling/support to help deal with issues.

Money

- Training – if on training can't claim community care grant when they move or to help set up home. If live at home can get Education Maintenance Allowance but if go on training get Gateway money, but penalised if off sick etc. EMA only available for school/college not training.
- Rents – high in supported accommodation – so impossible to work – lack of incentive to work.
- Not just about building houses
- No accommodation

Supported accommodation

- Some can cope better than others but all should be offered some level of support
- Responsibility from young person also
- Some support providers don't give people 2nd or 3rd chances.
- Nothing in Ponypool. Placed in B&B – moved twice. Not given any support at all. Had to contact social services herself.
- Room broken into in B&B.
- No-one should be in B&B at all.
- Given flat at 16 with no support – became addicted to drugs