

Access to Safe and Secure Housing for At Risk and Vulnerable Young People

Research estimates that approximately 12,000 'at risk' and 'vulnerable' young people aged 17–24 years are in 'unsafe' and/or 'insecure' housing.

Based on research by the Centre for Research Evaluation and Social Assessment (CRESA) (Kay Saville-Smith, Julie Warren and Ruth Fraser) and Public Policy and Research (Bev James). The project was jointly funded by CHRANZ and the Ministry of Youth Development.

At risk and vulnerable young people require active management, treatment or support from a wide range of education, health, welfare and justice agencies. This diverse group of young people includes those needing post-offending habilitation, young disabled people needing additional support in transition to independence, young people recovering from mental illness and/or addictions, young people leaving State care, young mothers and young refugees.

Housing is unsafe or insecure for nearly a third (30.4 percent) of these at risk and vulnerable young people for various reasons. They may live in dwellings where they are exposed to criminality, sexual or physical abuse, gangs or drug-making; their housing may be unaffordable, overcrowded or dilapidated; or they may live on the streets.

Most service providers report that inadequate housing compounds the problems of these young people and compromises the efficacy of the services they provide. Young people say they want more help and more housing options.

This research is the first systematic attempt to identify and explore the housing conditions of at risk and vulnerable young people in New Zealand.

Key Points

- Most at risk and vulnerable young people receiving services (63.3 percent) are adequately housed, but a significant group (30.4 percent) are in unsafe or insecure housing.
- 81.5 percent of service providers report that inadequate housing compromises getting positive results from their services.
- 85.1 percent of service providers report that unmet housing need presents a barrier to, or inhibits, at risk and vulnerable young people achieving positive outcomes.
- Service providers report they often devote a large component of their work to sorting out housing problems for their clients, even where they are not professionally involved in housing.
- Emergency housing and night shelters are very unsafe. Living in mixed hostels is especially risky for young women.
- Few housing providers provide housing for at risk and vulnerable young people.
- Many at risk and vulnerable young people (especially those aged 16–18 years) have not directly received housing assistance.
- Young people consistently say they need housing information and advisory services, housing advocacy, housing stock better suited to their needs and improvement in existing housing services
- International experience confirms that stable housing is critical to successful integration of at risk and vulnerable young people.
- Separate eligibility and entitlement to housing assistance and support is required.
- This needs to be complemented by increased investment in capacity and capability in most areas – for individual young people themselves, for housing and other service providers, as well as for local communities.

Research Process

This research explores the housing conditions of at risk and vulnerable young people in New Zealand, to gain information to better align housing and other welfare sectors. The research has involved:

- direct engagement with 80 vulnerable and at risk young people from Manukau and Waitakere cities through interviews and focus groups;
- a national survey of service providers from 147 organisations with at risk and vulnerable young clients;
- a review of international literature and practice; and
- use of service provider statistics, research findings from the Christchurch Health and Development Study and 2006 Census data to estimate the number of at risk and vulnerable young people in unsafe and/or insecure housing.

Findings

At Risk and Vulnerable Young People's Living Arrangements

Nearly a third (30.4 percent) of at risk and vulnerable young people live in unsafe and insecure housing. Within this group:

- 2.5 percent have no fixed abode or live on the streets;
- 12.6 percent live in unaffordable, overcrowded, or dilapidated housing; and
- 13.8 percent live in dwellings where they are exposed to criminality, sexual or physical abuse, gangs or drug-making.

Approximately 12,000 young people aged 17–24 years live in the unsafe and insecure dwellings described above. Similar conditions apply to even younger age groups. The 12–16 year age group straddles the boundary between children and young people.

The research estimates that there are between 14,500 and 20,000 aged 12–24 years who are both at risk and vulnerable and are in insecure or unsafe housing.

Barriers

For the 80 at risk and vulnerable young people participating in this research, housing affordability is the main barrier. They do not know much about the process of getting accommodation or how to run a household – especially household budgeting. Landlords are reluctant to let them tenancies, and they lack necessary credentials and renting histories. They are anxious about signing tenancy contracts. Many feel stigmatised by their pasts – even when they are victims, rather than perpetrators of anti-social behaviour.

Getting Accommodation and Help

The young people in this research say they have no direct housing assistance from government or voluntary agencies. They say they often feel intimidated by officials. A few have had good dealings with realtors but most feel they are a low priority and get poor service. Few of the young people received the Accommodation Supplement. Most are unaware of its existence and the eligibility criteria.

What Housing and Other Service Providers Say

Service providers attempting to assist these young people report that inadequate housing compounds the problems of these young people and compromises the efficacy of the services they provide. Not being able to access safe and secure housing exacerbates the chaotic nature of many of these young people's lives. It can cement young people into anti-social and (sometimes) illegal behaviours. It can lead to their further exposure to abuse and victimisation.

Unmet housing need is a top priority for action.

It is a major barrier to achieving positive outcomes. An overwhelming number of service providers (over 87.5 percent) rate meeting housing need very highly, i.e. they say it is 'essential' (58.1 percent) or 'mattered a lot' (29.4 percent) if their clients were to get overall positive outcomes.

International Experience

Internationally, 'housing stabilisation' is seen as being critical for integration, habilitation and recovery of at risk and vulnerable young people. Experience elsewhere shows that the diversity of need among at risk and vulnerable young people requires an integrated, but comprehensive, range of services and housing solutions.

Policy Implications

The research results suggest that, if New Zealand is to effectively ensure that at risk and vulnerable people have access to safe and secure housing, it needs to:

- make young people eligible for separate housing assistance entitlements;
- develop regionally-based housing strategies for at risk and vulnerable young people; and
- have a comprehensive range of housing programmes and assistance that allow housing solutions to be tailored to the particular and changing needs of a young person and that are directed to moving that young person towards maximising their housing independence.

New Zealand would also need to invest in the capacity and capability of:

- at risk and vulnerable young people to engage with the housing sector;
- housing providers to meet the diverse housing needs of at risk and vulnerable young people;
- service providers in the non-housing sectors (education, health, welfare and justice) to engage more actively with at risk and vulnerable young people and the housing sector to ensure safe and secure housing; and
- local communities to value and support effective housing solutions.



RESEARCH BULLETIN

Further Information

This bulletin is based on the report *Access to Safe and Secure Housing for At Risk and Vulnerable Young People*. A copy of the report and this bulletin can be found on the CHRANZ website under "Our Publications".

Other useful reports include:

- *Children's and Young People's Housing Experiences: Issues and Scoping Paper* (August 2007) Public Policy & Research
- *Affordable Housing: The Community Housing Sector in New Zealand* (September 2007) Capital Strategy and SGS Economics and Planning
- *Local Government and Affordable Housing* (August 2007) Centre for Research Evaluation and Social Assessment/ Public Policy & Research
- *Housing and Disability: Future Proofing New Zealand's Housing Stock for an Inclusive Society* (May 2007) Centre for Research Evaluation and Social Assessment/Public Policy & Research/Auckland Disability Resource Centre

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS This research bulletin was produced by the Centre for Housing Research, Aotearoa New Zealand (CHRANZ). The CHRANZ Board gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support provided by Housing New Zealand Corporation and the Ministry of Youth Development.

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