

This document provides a translation of correspondence received from GISDA

HSVP 08

Cymorth tai i bobl sy'n agored i niwed

Housing support for vulnerable people

Ymateb gan: GISDA

Response from: GISDA

OUR ORGANISATION

GISDA is a charity that provides accommodation, support and opportunities for homeless and/or vulnerable young people (aged 16-25) in Gwynedd, empowering them to move from support to independence. Each year, we support over 600 vulnerable young people.

Our Housing Support project offers support to young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Within the team, we have key workers, support workers, sleep-in workers and a property coordinator, providing a service to 62 young people across Gwynedd. This support is available in a range of accommodation, including: hostels, moving-on flats, housing for young parents, shared housing, mobile support and drop-in services.

Each member of staff offers a tailored support package, using our unique 'Model Fi' therapeutic model, which ensures that the individual is central to the support offered. The aim of this support is to help young people understand their rights and responsibilities, fostering the independence and resilience that they need to meet their current and future needs.

RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. How effectively the Welsh Government is planning for the future of the Housing Support Grant in light of rapid rehousing transition and the forthcoming Homelessness Bill;

The Welsh Government has taken positive steps to prioritise homelessness, as seen in the Homelessness White Paper. These priorities will need to be woven into the Homelessness Bill, but also be alongside funding and resources for the sector. There is concern that the current plans fail to take into account the specific needs of young people at risk of homelessness. Although the rapid rehousing approach is positive, young people who need intensive support face difficulties in moving to independent accommodation without ongoing support.

The Homelessness White Paper states that 59% of people who experience homelessness do so for the first time before they reach the age of 21. This highlights the need for tailored support in the transition to independence. Currently 85% of young people engaged with the Housing Support project are aged 21 or under. It is essential that the Welsh Government ensures that the Housing Support Grant includes specific provision for establishing and maintaining support services for young people in order to ensure that homelessness is prevented and to ensure that it is uncommon, short-lived and non-recurring.

The key challenges include:

Lack of long term planning for young people: the current arrangements do not explain how young people, including care leavers or those with complex needs, will receive ongoing tailored support.

Written evidence for the Local Government and Housing Committee - Inquiry into housing support for vulnerable people



Pressure on Housing Support Grant funding: the current budget does not reflect the growing demand for services or offer stability for providers working with young people.

More preventative services needed: although the Welsh Government emphasises the need to prevent homelessness, more investment is needed in mental health support, independent living skills and access to work and education.

2. Current and anticipated pressures in the delivery of HSG-funded support services, including pressures on the workforce

Lack of adequate funding: the demand for services has increased significantly, along with the complexity of young people's needs, but funding has not increased at the same rate. Salary costs and the running costs for accommodation and hubs have also increased significantly:

- The salary costs for the GISDA Housing Support project have risen by 41% from 20/21 to 25/26.
- The heating and electricity costs of our accommodation and hubs have risen 200% since 2021.
- In comparison, the Cymorth Cymru report states that the Housing Support Grant has been reduced by 13 million since 2012 in real terms.
- GISDA has had to use the company's reserves in the past to ensure that we reach the aims of our agreement, the quality of the support and to keep staff in post.

In 2021, GISDA commissioned a Social Return on Investment (SROI) report on our Housing Support project by Social Value Cymru. The report showed extremely positive outcomes, showing that every £1 invested equates to £5.77 of social value. These findings are evidence of the project's significant value for money, with the full report highlighting significant savings to the public purse. The main findings in the report for young people were greater independence,

Increase in complex needs: homelessness levels have increased significantly in Wales. According to Gwynedd data, there is an increase of 82% in the number of people presenting as homeless from 2018/18 (sic) to March 2022. As well as an increase in numbers, the needs of young people have also become more complex, including: serious mental ill health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, low resilience and lack of independent living skills, LGBTQ+ young people, care-experienced young people, young people aged 16 and 17, young parents, neurodiverse young people becoming more apparent and not eligible for services, young people who have missed a lot of school and with very low ability but do not meet learning disability criteria.

Gwynedd statistics

Written evidence for the Local Government and Housing Committee - Inquiry into housing support for vulnerable people



- Gwynedd Council's statistics show an increase of 111% in the number of young people (aged 16-25) presenting as homeless between 2019/20 and 2021/22.
- According to Gwynedd Council's Rapid Rehousing Plan, mental health is a secondary main need, with young people with support needs forming the second-largest group.
- The report also notes that individuals facing mental health challenges often experience secondary issues. This highlights the need for support for individuals with complex and multiple needs.

Statistics from the GISDA Housing Support Project 2023-2024

- 79% of the young people using the service experience poor mental health and need support in this area.
- 32% are part of the LGBTQ+ community.
- 27% are young parents.
- 85% are 21 years old or younger

Serious incidents and emergency services

- In 2023-2024, there were 112 serious incidents in the project.
- 20% of which lead to the need for treatment in A&E or hospital.
- 37% of which involved intervention by emergency services.
- 55% of which were related to mental health

GISDA Project Review by Gwynedd Council (2023-2024)

The review noted the complexity of the service's cases, with the following feedback: *"The case studies show how much support is needed and how complex the cases are. It is clear that the staff are very skilled in this sector and can provide a service that can change lives. We discussed the complexity of the service users and the extensive work required to ensure that they receive the appropriate support."*

Cymorth Cymru statistics

- 91% of service providers state that demand for support has increased in the last year.
- 94% state that the complexity of cases has increased.

The data above clearly shows that homelessness among young people is increasingly linked to mental health and other complex issues, creating significant challenges for support providers.

Case study - The case below highlights the story of an individual who has fallen through the gaps in the system, clearly showing how essential timely, consistent and appropriate support is for vulnerable young people.

Dewi, a post-care young person, was referred to GISDA after he left prison and found himself homeless. Having grown up in care since the age of 5, without stability, Dewi had fallen through the gaps in the system. He was diagnosed with learning difficulties as a child, but

Written evidence for the Local Government and Housing Committee - Inquiry into housing support for vulnerable people



received no specialist support as an adult, leaving a significant gap in his care and development.

A lack of timely support from agencies and a lack of family support when leaving care meant that Dewi did not have the necessary skills or guidance to navigate life as a young adult. As a result, he made difficult decisions that led to serious mistakes in his life, leading to a period in prison.

When moving to our hostel, he had profound support needs and lacked independent living skills, as he was used to other people doing tasks for him. He needed basic support with daily tasks such as using a washing machine, budgeting, and shopping. He was a vulnerable young person, prone to being led astray and losing his temper easily, creating risks for himself and others.

Working in partnership was key to supporting Dewi. GISDA staff worked closely with his probation officer, his post-care advisor, social services, and the mental health team. This ensured that each agency worked together effectively to monitor his progress, manage risks, and offer dedicated support. Regular multi-agency meetings were held to share information and ensure that Dewi was getting the right support at the right time.

Over time, it became evident that structured activities such as volunteering and creative sessions were helping to improve his behaviour. He was recently diagnosed with ADHD through close working with the mental health team, enabling more tailored support. Dewi continues to receive intensive support to control his temper, learn new skills, and reduce risks. Despite the challenges, he enjoys socialising, walking the staff's dogs, cooking, and being part of GISDA activities.

High workload for frontline staff: a lack of resources leads to increased pressures on staff, especially when supporting young people with complex needs. This leads to stress, lack of staff retention, and reduced capacity to provide sustainable support. The Cymorth Cymru report states that 91% of staff report a negative impact on their well-being. We see this here at GISDA with staff leaving their jobs, high levels of long-term sickness and an increase in time and resources to support staff eg reflective practice, counselling.

The Welsh Government must ensure that housing support funding reflects the increase in demand and needs.

3. How much is known about service performance, including data on outcomes

Information about the performance of homelessness services varies, but it does not always reflect the experiences or needs of young people. Although the new Housing Support outcomes framework provides information on review points, it does not track an individual's full journey through projects, nor measure in detail the needs of young people or the complexity of their support.

Written evidence for the Local Government and Housing Committee - Inquiry into housing support for vulnerable people



Although some local authorities have developed a single point of access (SPOA) system to collect and map need, there are many challenges facing young people using this system. For example:

Locally in Gwynedd, the process is done online or over the phone without face-to-face access, increasing the pressure on our hubs.

Young people do not usually disclose their full needs or identify risks in a telephone conversation with an SPOA officer, which means that the statistics do not reflect the true scale of need.

We welcome the annual reviews held by the local authority as an effective method of measuring the performance of projects in their entirety. The Welsh Government needs to ensure that monitoring systems include more qualitative data to map the area.

As a third sector organisation that is a charity and a social enterprise, we feel that we have the potential to offer much more support and attract matching funding from other funds. It would be beneficial for us to know what the "need" is within our local authority and to find out how many are on the waiting lists so that we can be in a strong place with the right data to make requests for funding, but also for us to be able to plan our services better eg understand what the trends are in terms of age, areas etc.

4. How effective is joint working between housing support services and public services such as health and social care

Although joint working between housing support services and public agencies is effective in some areas, significant gaps remain. For example, we are part of Cymorth Cymru North Wales forums, but unfortunately, a local Cymorth Housing forum no longer exists in Gwynedd, reducing opportunities for effective joint working locally.

One of the main challenges is the lack of integration with mental health services. Young people often face long delays in accessing mental health support, which can hinder their ability to maintain a tenancy. This not only puts additional pressure on Housing Support staff, but also creates unnecessary barriers for individuals seeking stability.

There are also significant problems in the referral process, with many young people unable to be referred to the correct services in an efficient manner. A clear process must be ensured, but one that is also flexible and tailored to individuals' needs.

There is a need for better collaboration between social services and accommodation and homelessness services in supporting 16 and 17 year olds, recognising that these young people often face significant challenges and need intensive support, carefully planned by specialist services and with additional resources to be able to do this. It is often felt that 16 and 17 year olds do not get the statutory services that are due to them and there is a fine line between the responsibility of social services and the duty of housing support funding. There should be a separate category for children under the age of 18, which places stricter requirements on all providers especially in terms of communication and in terms of age of transfer duty.

With an increasing number of very vulnerable children, many of whom have not been in school, and many of whom have suffered trauma but do not reach the threshold of coming into the care of the authority, many need services as adults 18+ beyond that which comes under the Housing Support fund but if they are not eligible for post-care services, or have a learning disability or mental health - there is no single body with a duty to look after them. There is no clarity regarding the duty of social services for adults 18+ who are extremely vulnerable.

In order to ensure more effective collaboration, a formal collaboration framework should be developed between housing support, health and social care services, with a specific focus on the needs of young people. This would not only improve collaboration, but also align with the White Paper on Homelessness, helping to create a more integrated and accessible system for those in need.

5. What services should be commissioned in the future to effectively support people with complex needs to find and keep a home

To support young people effectively, it must be ensured that support is tailored to their needs, including specialist services that focus specifically on them. Dedicated services are essential for the future of the Housing Support grant and to implement the Homelessness Bill, which places a strong emphasis on preventing homelessness.

In 2022, GISDA completed joint research with Bangor University to test the TAYP (Team Around the Young Person) support model. Similar to the Housing First approach, TAYP provides accommodation alongside holistic support tailored to the individual, ensuring their success and preventing them from experiencing homelessness again. The research highlights the need for one-to-one support with a key worker to guide the young person through the process. Often, individuals with complex needs deal with a number of different professionals from specialist services, so it is vital that the support is relevant, timely and co-ordinated.

- **Funding for existing providers** - it must be ensured that existing providers receive additional funding to support people with complex needs. Although providers do their best to support these individuals, staff capacity limits their ability to meet demand. Given their expertise, they are the best in providing effective support, but additional investment is required to make this a practicality.
- **Special provision for young people** - the White Paper *Ending Homelessness in Wales* highlights the need for preventative services for young people. The document states that "a sample of people experiencing homelessness in Wales suggests 59% first became homeless before the age of 21". This underlines the need for services specifically commissioned for young people, rather than general services being used for them. Young people are facing challenging transitional periods in their lives, and they need intensive and targeted support to help them to avoid homelessness. This

means that more funding and resources are needed to provide the appropriate support.

- **Supported accommodation for young people** – it is essential to increase the supply of supported accommodation that is specifically tailored for young people. This should include dedicated support staff, appropriately trained to deal with the complex needs of young people. Although the White Paper highlights the need for specialist accommodation and support for LGBTQ+ people, there is no clear action plan for this. This should include partnerships with organisations specialising in LGBTQ+ issues to provide safe accommodation, specific support, and staff training to ensure services are inclusive and welcoming. The Welsh Government recognises that supported accommodation is essential for young people, and therefore it is essential to invest in this provision.

"We propose for people aged under 25, the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfasts and shared accommodation, should not be permitted for any time period."

"We propose to make it clear through legislation that where people of this age group are to be housed in temporary accommodation, it must be supported accommodation which is tailored to the individual or household and their needs."

- **Youth Housing First Model** - Housing First schemes may be tailored for individuals aged 16 to 25. Some regions in the UK and Europe ([Housing First & Youth - Housing First Europe](#)) ([Housing First for Youth | Homeless Link](#)) recognise young people as a specific category within the Housing First approach, providing them with specialist support. This should be consistent throughout Wales to ensure that young people are not omitted from this model.
- **Provision for LGBTQ+ young people** - research by *End Youth Homelessness Wales* shows that young LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience homelessness. Supported accommodation schemes that are specifically designed for this group are needed, with the security that the accommodation is safe and understands their needs. This may include commissioning services that specialise in supporting LGBTQ+ individuals and ensuring that accommodation and services throughout Wales are inclusive and responsive to their needs.
- **Provision for young parents** - there is a need to recognise the specific challenges facing young parents and provide supported accommodation tailored to their needs. Support for young parents is essential to prevent homelessness and ensure stability for the whole family.
- **Creative interventions** - creative work is extremely effective, especially when delivered on a 1:1 basis or in small groups by staff who know the young people well

and understand their unique needs. This personal approach creates a safe environment where young people can participate confidently, feeling valued and heard. For young people with complex experiences and facing homelessness, creative interventions offer a powerful way of expressing emotions, processing difficult experiences, and building self-esteem.

- **Participation** - including the voices of people with lived experience is essential for services. The Housing Support Grant should make it essential that every project ensures that people's voices are clear in the work. At GISDA VOICE is one of our strategic aims and we ensure that the voices of vulnerable young people are heard in all aspects of our work. Our methods of gathering voices and feedback include: A weekly young people's board, resident meetings in each hostel, regular feedback gathered by team leaders, support tailored and planned with the young person, responding to external consultations, young representative on the Welsh Youth Parliament and much more.

In 2023-2024, 98% of young people said that they were happy with the Housing Support service. Here is some feedback:

"(staff) saved my life. It's nice to have someone that I'm able to talk openly with without judgement."

"I can't ask for anyone better than (staff), she's helped me through so much, she's an amazing person and she makes an effort to help all of us out." Never a dull moment"

"Without GISDA, because of my family neglect, i would have skipped meals, been to poor to afford transport and would have been hell getting on UC and contacting the right people. (Staff) and the service they provide is sensational for young homeless, unemployed, neglected, parents etc. This journey could have been a lot harsher without her"

- **Working in a way that is based on an understanding of trauma:** all homelessness service providers should work in a way that is based on an understanding of trauma (trauma-informed) and follow the PIE principles (Psychologically Informed Environments). This approach ensures that support is provided in a comprehensive way that takes into account the complex life experiences of individuals and the impact of trauma on their behaviour and mental health. By creating safe, empathetic and considerate environments, services can go beyond just meeting basic needs and offer emotional and practical support that promotes recovery and personal development. Such a holistic approach helps individuals to feel valued, heard, and understood, improving their chances of building a more stable and independent future. At GISDA, we have developed a special framework for young people, namely Model Fi, which forms the basis of our approach. Model Fi is based on PIE principles and ensures that the young person is central to all of our activities. The model has proven successful over the years, with positive outcomes for young people.

Written evidence for the Local Government and Housing Committee - Inquiry into housing support for vulnerable people



- **Preventative services - collaboration with educational institutions:** the homelessness prevention project will work with schools and colleges to raise awareness of the essential life skills that young people need to live independently. Sessions will focus on areas such as budgeting, managing money, and preparing for real life, giving them the resources and information that they need to avoid homelessness in the future. GISDA has over 10 years' experience of working with schools and colleges to deliver homelessness prevention workshops. Through this work, we have supported hundreds of young people to understand the risks associated with homelessness and the steps that they can take to avoid it. In addition, the project will raise awareness of homelessness itself, challenging stigma and ensuring that young people understand the support services available to them if needed. By liaising with young people early on, we aim to support them before they reach crisis point, empowering them to make informed decisions and plan for their future.