

West Oxfordshire Homeless Prevention Project sets up scheme to help homeless Young People from the local area get secure and safe accommodation.

Homelessness amongst Young People in West Oxfordshire is a real problem. The lack of emergency, temporary and supported accommodation in the district means many vulnerable Young People who become homeless have no alternative but to live in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation in Oxford.

Roz Denson from West Oxfordshire Homeless Prevention Project aka WOHPP says “The majority of Young People we support are terrified at even the prospect of going to Oxford and living in emergency accommodation. For most of these Young People it is the first time they have lived away from their home environment and ventured outside of the local area. Suddenly they are faced with having nowhere to live and often no money. They are then expected to live in unfamiliar surroundings with limited access to support, in accommodation that is occupied by people who are of varying ages and come from a mix of backgrounds. The majority of these Young People are understandably completely ‘out of their depth’ and whilst they are in Oxford we see their problems multiply and their needs increase as they try to cope.

As an organisation we find that one of our biggest challenges is getting people to realise that homelessness exists in this area. People automatically associate homelessness with people sleeping rough on the street and if they don’t see that in their area they assume that it doesn’t exist. Homelessness is a much more complex issue and the ones sleeping rough reflect only a small number of actual homeless people. It is also a problem which affects many Young People particularly in an area such as West Oxfordshire due to the high cost of buying and renting accommodation. Few can afford it and if they can’t remain at home, their opportunities for finding accommodation are virtually non-existent. Young People are then caught in the homelessness and poverty trap and struggle to get out of it”.

In response to this problem the Supported Lodgings Scheme has been set up in order to reduce the numbers of Young People going into emergency accommodation. The scheme known as SPLODGE provides family-style accommodation for homeless 16-25 year olds.

Families known as hosts are recruited from the local community, they are people who have a spare room and the motivation to support a Young Person. Hosts are provided with training and on-going support through WOHPP and receive a weekly payment for the services provided to the scheme i.e. rent of the room, laundry facilities; cooking facilities etc. Hosts also play a part in supporting the Young Person to gain the life skills necessary for independent living.

The Young Person whose stay is agreed on a 28 day renewable licence basis also receives ongoing support from WOHPP. The West Oxfordshire scheme which was set up earlier in the year is modelled on the successful SPLODGE scheme in Banbury which is run by BYHP (Supporting Young People in Housing Need), and has already successfully placed and supported one young person who is now housed and living independently.

WOHPP’s aim is to increase the number of placements available to homeless Young People through recruiting more hosts. If you have a spare room and are interested in

becoming a SPLODGE host or would like more information please contact Gillian Grainger Project Co-ordinator at WOHPP, 14 Church Green, Witney, OX28 4AW. Phone: 01993 775718 Mobile: 07812 036794