



THE NATIONAL HOUSE PROJECT

Vision:

Young people leaving care live independent and fulfilling lives

Mission:

A national registered charity developed with young people leaving care, providing sustainable homes and a community of support that enables young people to have confidence in themselves and their future

What is the House Project?

The House Project (HP) takes a ground-breaking approach through its commitment to young people's ownership to enable young people leaving care to achieve successful independence. The Project was co-designed with young people from the start and works on cooperative principles through which adults and young people in and leaving care work together to refurbish properties that become their homes and build a long-term community of support. The project began by asking young people 'what makes a house a home?' In 2015 the young people in the first House Project [shared their views](#) with Edward Timpson, Children's and Families Minister. They talked about how living a happy life needs more than a physical property. It requires skills, knowledge and confidence to manage a home, positive relationships that make you feel valued and a connection to your community that you contribute to and are supported by.

Why are we doing this?

Every year around 10,000 young people in England leave local authority (LA) care. The poor outcomes that occur during transition and beyond are hugely influenced by the traumatic experiences that brought young people into care. This can then often be compounded by experiences within the care system.

Moving to independence from 16 and living alone from 18 as a care leaver is daunting. Doing this without the support of close family and at a much earlier age than the general population (average age of leaving home is 24) does not work for many young people. They have described to us their loneliness, fear and the feeling that they have been 'dropped off a cliff.'

Against all the key indicators in education, employment, health, offending and accommodation, outcomes for care leavers are unacceptable. The National Audit Office report 'Care Leavers Transition to Adulthood' notes that a third of care leavers experience homelessness between 6-24 months after leaving care. Other research highlights that over 25% of the adult prison population have been in care and that care leavers are four times more likely than the general population to have mental health problems.

It was our ambition to improve outcomes for young people that led to the establishment of the first HP in Stoke-on-Trent. We recognised the energy, creativity and will to thrive of our young people. Through the HP this potential was channelled by young people into managing the refurbishment of properties which became their homes and building a community of support to overcome the loneliness and fear they had described. The process focused on maximising young people's ownership of all aspects of the project, so they could feel proud of what they had developed and have confidence in themselves and their futures.

What have we done so far?

In its successful first phase, funded in 2015 by the DfE, young people aged 16+ managed the refurbishment of void properties in Stoke-on-Trent, which they have moved into and which became their homes for as long as they wanted.

A second phase of DfE Innovation funding in 2017 enabled the development of new HPs in five LAs and the establishment of 'The National House Project' as a National Charity which has developed the framework and provides the expertise and support to enable any group of young people and the adults working with them to set up a HP in their own LA.

All six LAs who established House Projects in the Innovation programme continued after the pilot phase and new projects have been established in Wolverhampton and Manchester in England and in Fife, East Dunbartonshire and Midlothian in Scotland in partnership with Life Changes Trust

A third phase of DfE innovation funding was awarded in 2020 to ensure sustainability and create the infrastructure to scale, securing the establishment of new LHPs across the country. Additionally, monies have been provided to establish a support platform that can be rolled out so that all care leavers in a LA can access online resources and connect with staff and each other.

We are already seeing young people move to successful independence by transitioning to full council tenancies whilst maintaining contact with the project – an informal source of support that lasts as long as it needs to. For others, the project has provided the confidence to get jobs and stay in college – aspirations that had previously seemed completely out of their reach.

As of March 2021, our HP community had risen to 250 with 140 of these living successfully in the community.

The National House Project (NHP)

The NHP is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, established in August 2018 as part of phase two of the DfE Innovation Programme. It supported the development of HPs in phase 2 and created the evidence base, resources and financial modelling to support roll out and scaling to interested LAs. NHP plan to establish a further 25 projects before March 2024.

Interested LAs will be supported to set up their own Local House Project (LHP) via membership arrangements with the NHP. With contracted support arrangements and a suite of resources the fidelity of the model is assured.

House Project Programme (HPP)

The House Project Programme has been developed with young people and is delivered by a groupwork approach. It takes a pedagogical approach and the activities and experiences provide the understanding, skills and knowledge to build confidence to be successful and own their House Project. It is modular and web-based and young people can access it either from their phones or computer. This also enables them to add uploads to showcase their journey on the House Project and demonstrate what they have achieved. The Programme is accredited by AQA and by engaging in the programme as part of a pathway into other things the young people on the programme are recorded as being in Education, Employment or Training (EET). The Programme is linked to the psychologically informed practice framework ORCHIDS.

Our theory of change – the ORCHIDS framework

The ORCHIDS framework defines the HP and makes it different to other leaving care and accommodation options. It provides a clear operating framework that uses the energy, experience and creativity of young people and develops a supportive and safe base from which to explore the world and build a positive future. The ORCHIDS framework is based on young people:

1. Taking **Ownership** for decisions affecting their lives, their home and the development of their project.
2. Taking **Responsibility** for keeping themselves safe, looking after others and the project.
3. Building a **Community** of support for as long as they need it
4. Having their own **Homes**
5. Gaining **Independence** and skills to cope emotionally & financially through accessing support when needed
6. Gaining a sense of their **Developmental** direction
7. Having a positive **Sense** of wellbeing

ORCHIDS is underpinned by the psychological theory of self-determination which says that psychological health requires three basic needs to be met – autonomy (the need to feel in control of what we do and how we do it), competence (the need to learn to do things and be good at something) and relatedness (the need to feel a sense of belonging and an attachment to other people).

The framework enables young people to be the authors of their own futures and develop control and responsibility for their own lives. We know that pride in doing things for yourself is a key to unlocking young people’s potential. They work closely with a staff group who know them well and who are supported by a psychologist to ensure that the projects are delivered safely.

HPs use the framework to plan and deliver direct work with their young people; work in a way that enables partners and the broader workforce to engage in the project and drive practice in a positive, energised and respectful way. It provides a safe context for supporting young people into independence and a set of standards to recognise, celebrate and build on success. Working to a framework rather than a model ensures fidelity but allows for difference.

Care Leavers National Movement (CLNM)

To maximise the ownership of young people and ensure that the NHP Board takes in to account their views and opinions a CLNM has been established and is made up of two young people from each LHP. It meets monthly and is facilitated by a care experienced professional. Two young people from the CLNM are supported to sit as expert advisors to the NHP Board.

Young People’s feedback

Our approach was driven by the views of young people at every stage of the process. We needed to ‘do’ leaving care better and differently. Young people described being placed in flats with no choice about where they lived or how the ‘moving in’ budget was spent. For anyone who has experienced abuse, not having a space in which they feel safe can be overwhelming.

‘When you first get told that you are moving to live independently, it is really scary; it is the scariest thought in the world’.

‘You’re moving out; you’re straight out there; you’re on your own’

‘You’ve just got to face it and do it by yourself, with no one to comfort you’

But it was not enough simply to provide a nice flat in a nice area, because this did not get to the heart of the issues. Our young people did not want to be ‘done to’ or ‘done for’, they wanted to be able to take back control and not be alone - particularly powerful from people who have experienced neglect and abuse. Young people told us that:

‘We need pride. Coming from the care system it’s difficult to find something to be proud of’

‘I want to be standing up and people feeling proud of me’

‘You’re with other people so you don’t feel alone’

The results of its pilot phase are powerful. Nothing exemplified this power more than the visit of Edward Timpson, former Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families (to view the visit [click here](#)). During the visit one young person explained:

'I'd compare the House Project to a tree; we've planted it and we're growing up. We're all together and we're all going up.'

Jason's film shows how a young man who had lived in residential care and become homeless was able to find a new home and new hope through the project. To view his story [click here](#).

'I feel like I am not going out there alone now. That is different to how I felt before the House Project started.'

How does a local authority set up a House Project and how does it work?

[The House Project - How does it work?](#)

Interested LA's have initial discussion with the NHP and both parties agree that establishing a House Project is right for them. We have a self-assessment tool that assists LAs to think about what needs to be in place to support a successful House Project. Integral to this is a relationship with a Housing Provider who will work with the LA to secure properties for young people leaving care on an annual basis.

The decision to proceed must be informed by the views of young people and they, with senior officers, 'pitch' to the NHP as to why a HP is right for them and how it would work.

Once a decision is made to proceed a membership agreement will be signed. This outlines the obligations on both parties and the NHP provides direct support and guidance and shares the tools and resources to establish a LHP. (see the 'Offer' document). NHP support the recruitment of a skilled staff group and provide training on trauma informed practice, attachment styles, the ORCHIDS framework and the HP Programme.

The HP aims to ensure that all young people have a secure education, employment and training and offer and pathway. The HPP is accredited by AQA and involves links being built with local companies and training providers who will offer a range of opportunities including taster days, work experience, apprenticeships and permanent employment.

Whilst working on the programme, young people engage with the Housing Provider to ensure that they have some choice in where they live and are involved getting in their property ready to become their home. Young people will initially move in on an introductory tenancy and when they 'graduate' from the HP they remain in the property with a secure tenancy. They continue to be a member of the HP community for as long as they wish.

Housing providers get good tenants and LAs have a long-term, sustainable housing solution to meet the needs of young people leaving the care system.

Outcomes from Phase 1 of the House Project

The first HP began in Stoke-on-Trent in 2015. Ten young people were nominated, applied and gained places on the HP. They refurbished void properties leased from the council. York University evaluated the project in 2017 and reported that 8 of the 10 original young people were settled into their own property and were successfully maintaining their HP tenancies. Watch their stories at our [YouTube channel](#).

Outcomes from Phase 2 of the House Project

The Independent Evaluation in 2020 reported that NHP had achieved its service level outcomes and provided a holistic and coordinated support package for young people, and advice and training for LHP staff. LAs recognised the expertise provided by NHP and the involvement of young people as a 'best practice' exemplar. Furthermore, much of the innovative ways of working were recognised by LAs as 'best practice' which were stimulating developments across wider service provision. Young people had developed friendships, social skills and confidence and developed the ability to make up their own mind which contributed to a significant change in satisfaction with life as a whole.

Financial modelling

LAs have a statutory duty to provide accommodation and care until 18 years, and to provide support to care leavers up until 25. The cost of accommodation represents one of the highest challenges to LA budgets and often with little evidence of achieving good outcomes.

The HP approach provides intensive support and with the development of a community of peer support, for as long as is required, it replicates the principles of 'staying put' and 'staying close'. With skilled and experienced staff, the project provides a safe step down from residential/foster care, allowing their support to be provided at lower costs. Furthermore the improved outcomes reduce the demand on wider LA and partner agency budgets with fewer tenancy breakdowns, improved emotional, physical and mental health and less contact with criminal justice services.

A Cost Benefit Analysis in the Evaluation Report showed a positive return on investment of 1.4 from year 2 (a saving of £1.40 for each £1 invested in the HP) which increases to 2.0 in year 3. We are less than convinced that this accurately demonstrates the savings to LAs with one saving £600k in the past year and intend to undertake a piece of work to review the CBA to LAs.

NHP have developed a financial modelling paper and interested LAs can provide indicative salary and placement costs which NHP will use to develop a financial modelling paper for that LA.

How does the Local House Project save money?

The cost of running a HP is circa £200k (£20k per young person based on a cohort of 10).

Sam (aged 16) was in an out of area residential placement at a cost of £160kpa. Sam wanted to return to his home LA but did not want to live in a family setting and would struggle to live independently in a flat. After completing the HPP Sam moved into the HP property at aged 17. The LA used monies that would have been used on his placement towards funding his part of the project saving the LA £140k pa. Sam remains in his flat and is a good council tenant.

Jane (aged 16) was in a LA foster care placement and wanted to live independently but was assessed as requiring a high level of support. By supporting Jane into a HP property (£20k) just after her 17th Birthday the LA was able to use the vacant foster care placement to bring back a young person placed in a residential placement (£180kpa). This saved the LA £160k.

These two moves enabled the LA to avoid expenditure in excess of £300kpa which covered the cost of the project and delivered a £100k saving. The HP works on a cohort of around ten young people and savings from each of the other 8 young people were made.

Want to know more? We can be contacted on the details below to discuss any element of HP. Please also see links below:

- Evaluation Phase 2 - [The House Project for young people leaving care 2020](#)
- Evaluation from the Stoke House Project Phase 1 - [Making a House a Home: The House Project Evaluation March 2017](#)
- Editorial in CYPNow - [The House Project](#)
- [Pillars & Foundations: Next practice in children's services](#) (page 8)
- [National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers' First Year Report](#) (page 18)

T: 01270 215888

M: 07876217799

E: enquiries@thehouseproject.org

Office: The National House Project, Couzens Building CO3A, Crewe Green Road, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 5DU