simon community
Northern Ireland

Pathways to Youth Homelessness

MACS: Stories from our young people

Provider Response

Research Process

- Masters student
- Multi-agency working group
- 2 pronged approach
  - Questionnaires via survey monkey
  - In-depth interview

Research Sample

- 79 young people aged 18-25 years participated via questionnaire
- 10 young people through in-depth individual interviews
- Key findings relate to 79 young people who participated in the survey, and then is built upon by the in-depth interviews

Key Findings - Demographics

Gender

- 61% female 39% male

Age Range: 18-25 years

- 1/3 aged 18, majority under 21 years

Geographical area

- 47% grew up in either Belfast or Derry/ Londonderry

Religious affiliation

- 37% Catholic, 33% Protestant, 29% not affiliated with any religion

Disability

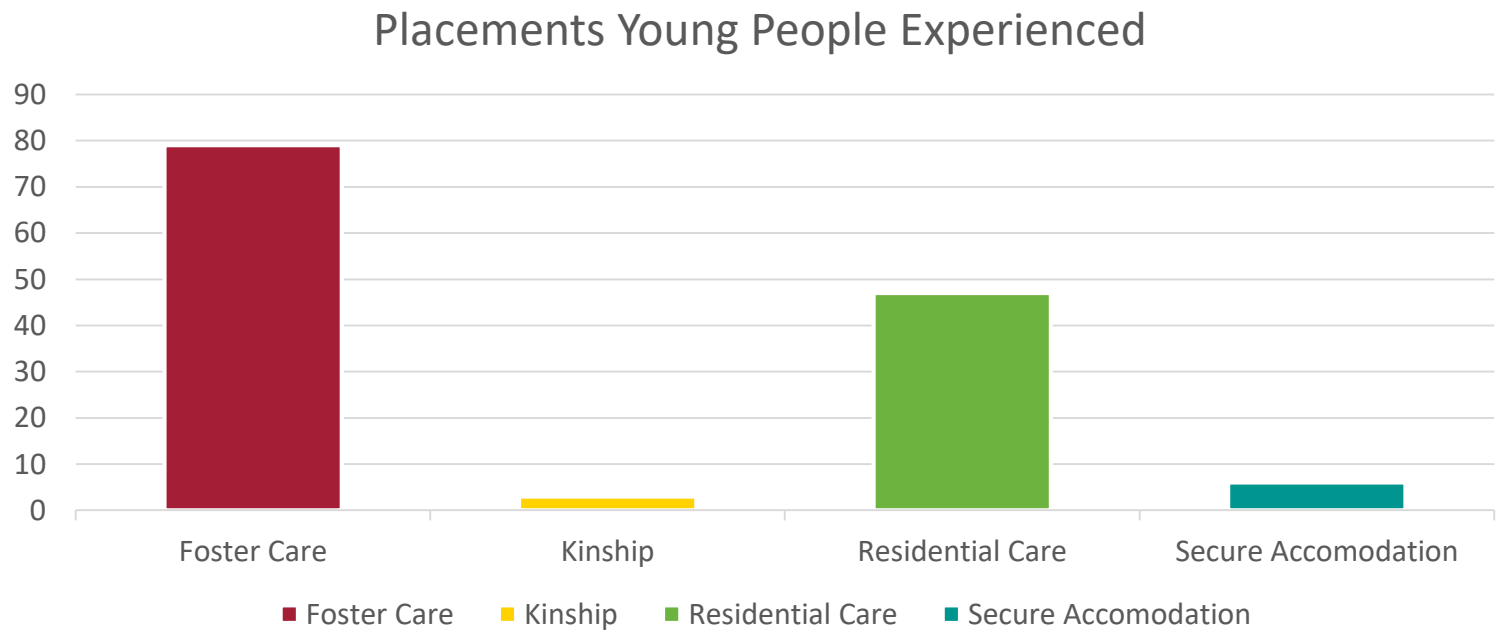
- 14% stated that had a disability

Sexual Orientation

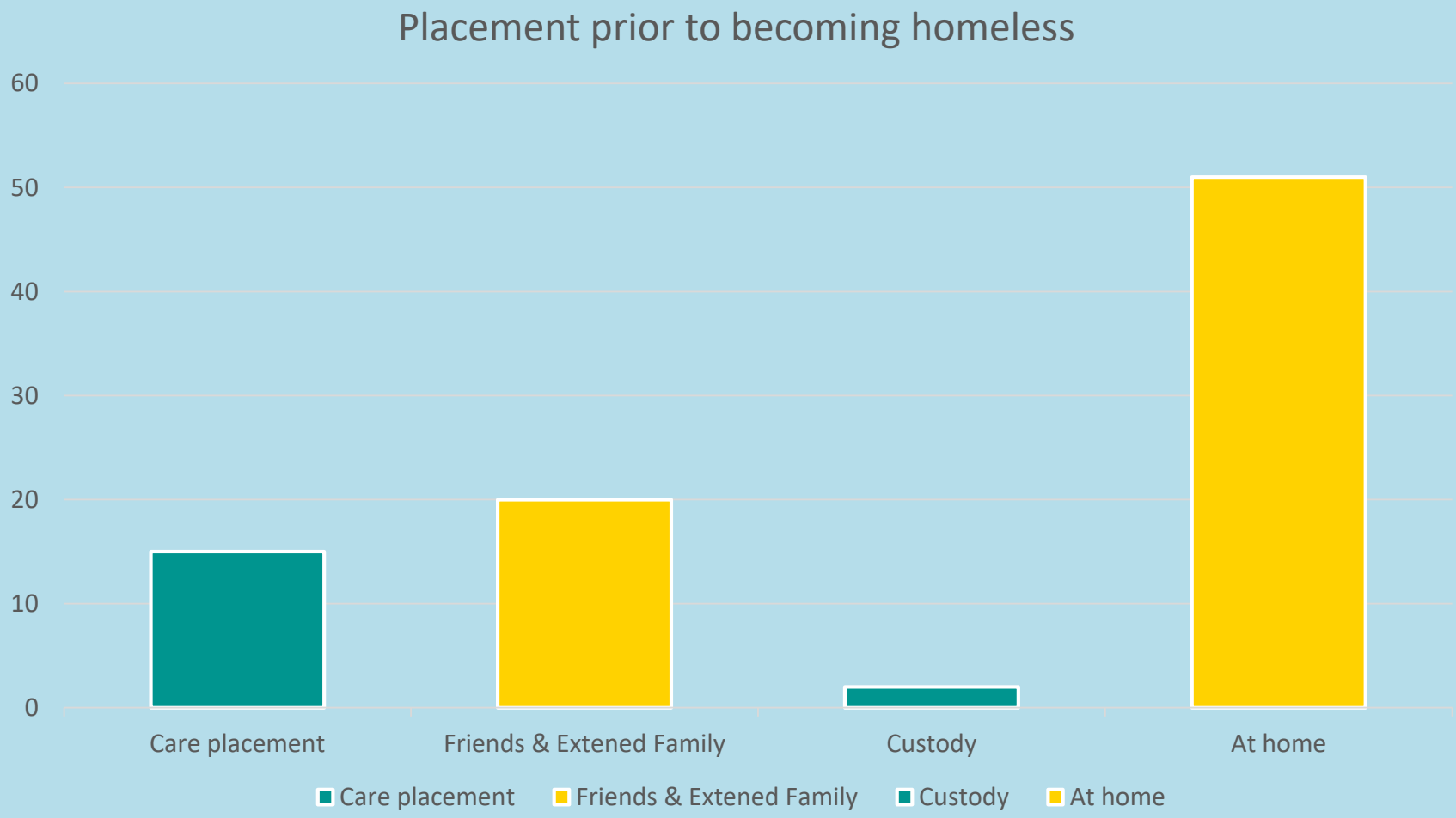
- 18% LGBT or unsure (significant in comparison to 1.9% of general population)

Key Findings – Care History

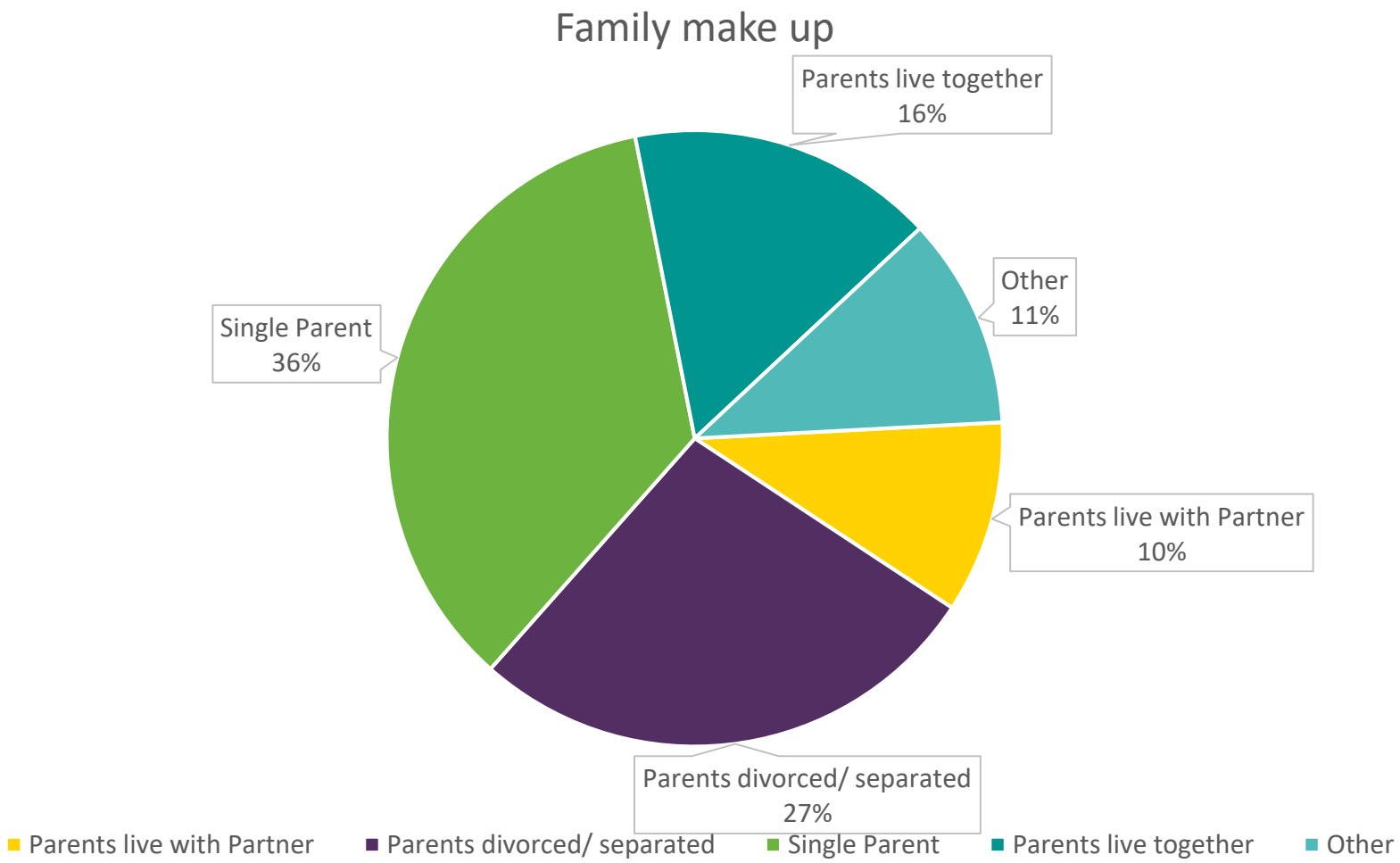
- 43% had experience of living in care, in a variety of settings
- Young people experiencing multiple placement moves, ranging from 1-13. The average age of placements was 6.



Key Findings – Family Background



Key Findings – Family Makeup



Key Findings - Lack of Father Figure

- Mother was primary carer
- Many had no contact with their father, or had never experienced living with them

" My father left when I was a baby" - Peter, Portadown

"He left when I was two" - Michael, Derry

"I haven't know him for 18 years like, my dad" - Simon, Belfast

Key Findings - Family Conflict & Relationship Breakdown

- Significant factor in young people's journey into homelessness

"Because you know my dad killed someone and my uncle killed someone and then I'm thinking is that going to come back on me" - Peter, Portadown

"...her [Michael's mum] boyfriend still cheats on her with prostitutes regularly." - Michael, Derry

"There was just fighting all the time and then it didn't help that my brother was going through his terrible teenage phase, getting in trouble all the time so that made them fight even more." - Olivia, Derry

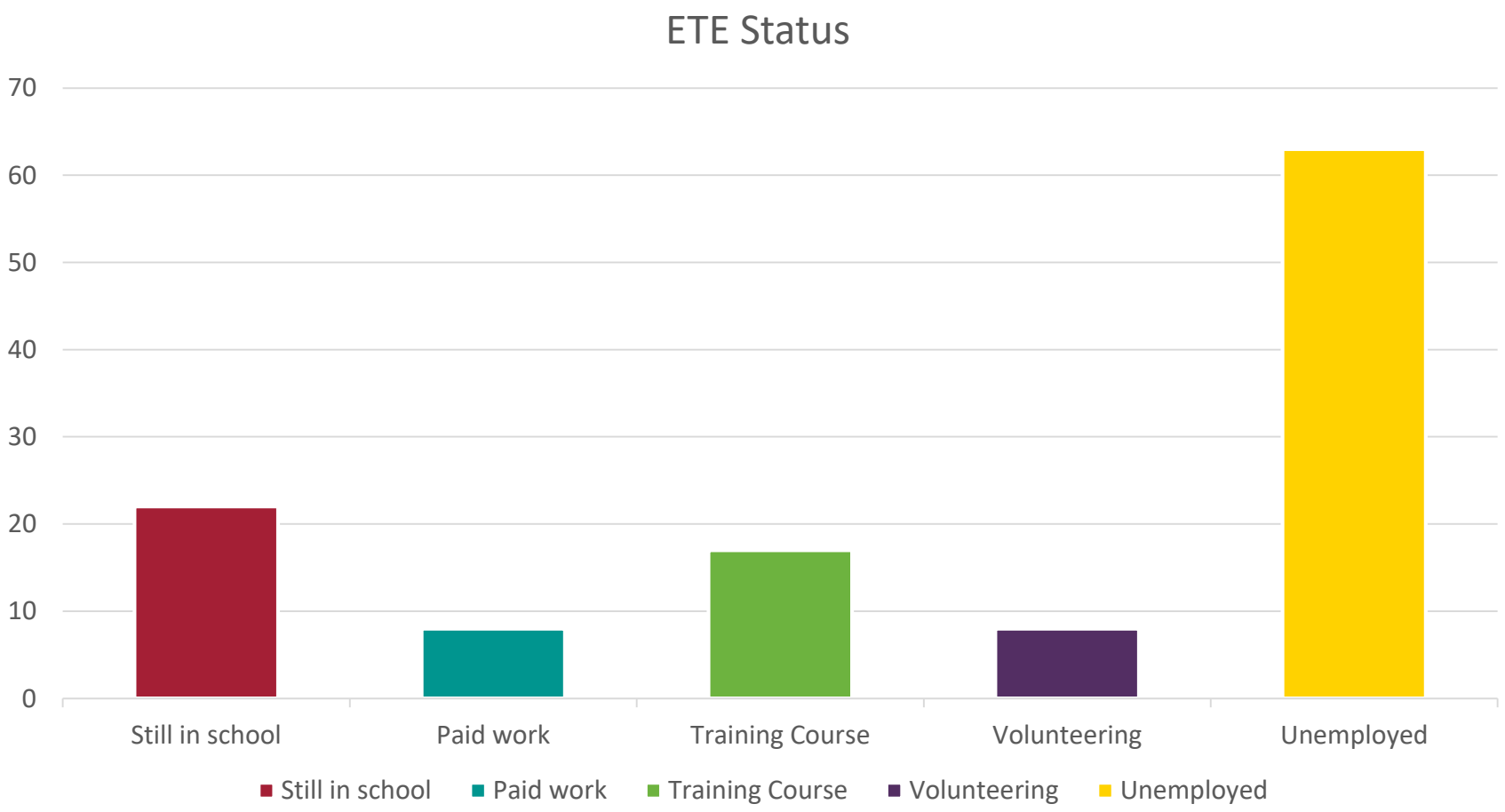
'I was fighting with everyone and I was really struggling getting along with my mum and dad and wee brother.' - Lisa, Lisburn

Key Findings – Family Contact

- 82% young people still had contact with their families, only 59% viewed their contact as positive

- 1/3 of young people had children, with just under 50% having lived with their children

Key Findings – Education, Training and Employment



Key Findings – School Departure Age

- 54% stated they left school at 16 or under (19% leaving school before 16, the compulsory age of attendance)

"I left school at twelve and before that there I didn't learn much out of school"
- Peter, Portadown

- 15% left with no qualifications
- 20% had essential skills
- 15% had a NVQ
- 25% had attained GCSE
- 9% had A-levels

Key Findings – Experience of School

- 47% rated their experience as negative, only 1/3 rated as positive
- 67% of young people *“felt they did not fit in at school”*
- 47% of young people *“struggled to keep up with learning”*

Key Findings – Experiences of Bullying

"…it's just really bad …my parents were going through the separation, my brother was acting out, my mum was going crazy. I just couldn't handle bullying on top of that." - Olivia, Derry

"…they took my sheets and stuff out of my school bag and just threw them… A really, really packed tight paper ball with cellotape… pelted it at my face on the bus." - Lisa, Lisburn

"Then at tech, my background caught up with me – people found out I was homeless and so fake Facebook accounts were made to harass me." - Jimmy, Coleraine

Key Findings – Drug & Alcohol Use

- 75% young people stated they drank alcohol, with only 3% identifying as having an alcohol problem.
  - However, 15% had accessed alcohol support services
- 46% young people stated they used or had used drugs. Including:
  - Cannabis (44%)
  - Cocaine (24%)
  - Prescription drugs (24%)
  - Ecstasy (23%)
  - Legal Highs (19%)

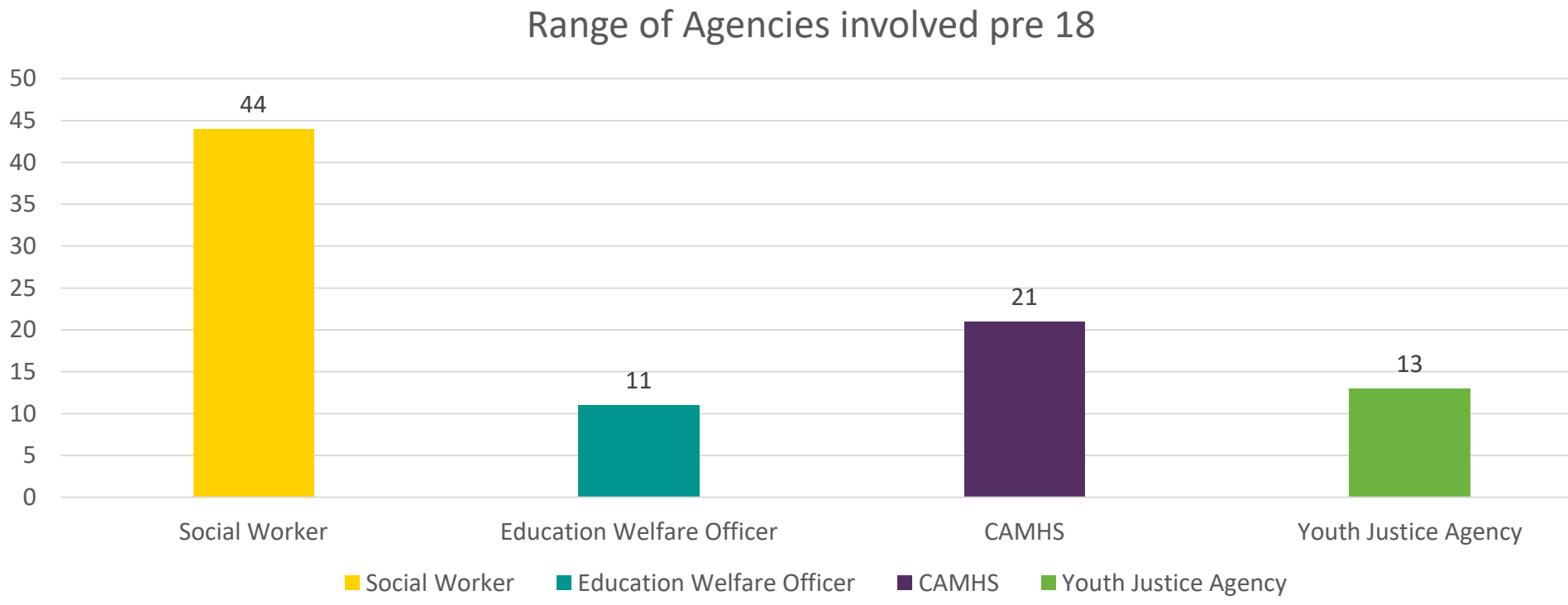
- 28% were presently using drugs, only 7% identified drug use as problematic, however around one third had contact with drug support services.

Key Findings – Impact of Drug Use

- 49% of the young people stated that drug and alcohol use had either caused conflict within their home or played a direct role in their homelessness

"One night me, her [his mum] and Steve were sitting sniffing [cocaine]… they had coke and I had meth. I didn't think that me ma was going to take meth and I was like, right Steve, I have a wee bit of meth now that the coke's running out and you can keep the coke for after to bring us down again. But aw naw, me ma got ripped into it." - Michael, Derry

Key Findings – Agency Support & Involvement

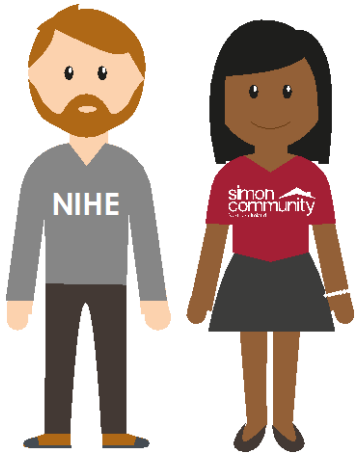


Key Findings – Views on Agency Support

- Of those who had a social worker – 40% cited this as positive, 42% as negative, 18% didn't know
- Of young people who had an Education Welfare Officer - 21% cited this as positive, 64% as negative, 14% didn't know
- Of young people who had involvement with CAMHS - 52% cited this as positive, 37% negative, 11% didn't know
- Of the young people who had Youth Justice Agency involvement - 82% cited this as positive, 18% negative

Key Findings – Agency Involvement Post 18

- 43% stated they currently had a Social Worker
- 16% linking in with Mental health Services
- 3% probation
- Due to young people turning 18 - CAMHS, Youth Justice and Education Welfare support ends



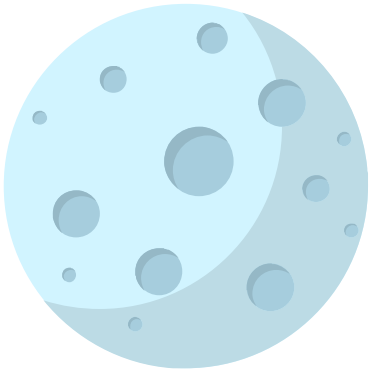
- 63% of young people were working with an agency prior to becoming 18 - **could more have been done to prevent their pathway into homelessness?**

Key Findings – What Support is Wanted

- 53% of young people stated they need support in relation to their mental health, including issues of self harm and suicide ideation
- 13% required support in relation to their Alcohol and Drug Use
- 27% required financial and debt management

Key Findings – Hopes & Aspirations

- 20% stated they had little or no hope for the future
- 37% stated they had some hope
- 43% were feeling positive and hopeful about the future



Key Findings – Participant's Own Words

"More encouragement to stay at school."

"More opportunities for social housing."

"Better support needed in children's home so we can stay there longer or up until we are ready to move out."

"Better support from local NIHE - more local hostels for females."

"Wifi needed (in supported accommodation) ASAP!"

"Better access to mental health services and a clearer, easier system for young people in relation to the housing process."

"More support when social services end."

"Agencies to be more open minded and tolerant of young people."

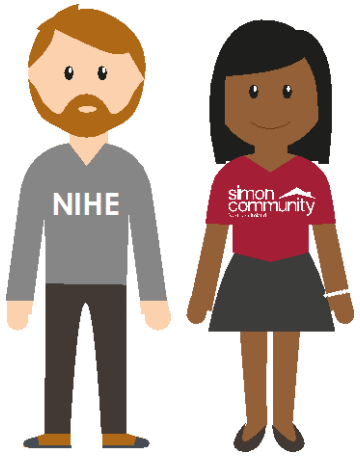
"For people to show more respect to young adults like the people living here."

"I believe there is no help for us."

"I think that if young people had more emotional support it would enable them to do better in everyday life."

Key Findings – Conclusion and learning

- The impact of conflict, trauma & abuse during early life
- Agency involvement and family support pre & post 18
- The education system
- The impact of drug and alcohol use



NIHRC - Homelessness