

Children's Services

Supported Lodgings

Background to the project

The Supported Lodgings Team was initiated in response to the growing body of evidence showing that many young care leavers are disadvantaged by trying to live independently much sooner than their contemporaries and because there is insufficient suitable and affordable accommodation available for this age group.

Most young people make the transition to adulthood with practical and emotional support from their family.

Leaving home may take time and several attempts before a young person succeeds in achieving full independence, nationally the fluctuating average age for young people leaving home is approx mid-20s.

In contrast, young people leaving care are often on their own before they are 18, frequently when they are 16. As a result, many of them experience long lasting disadvantages. For example, they are less likely to have achieved any academic qualifications, they are more likely to suffer poorer health than their contemporaries. They are more likely to be unemployed and they are less likely to be able to earn sufficient or manage what money they do have to support independent accommodation, which results in them more often becoming homeless.

Supported Lodgings will offer a period of stability during which these young people can be helped to acquire the necessary skills, build up support networks in their local community and experiment safely with their increasing freedom and changing status while still having involvement with, and support from, an interested adult.

What are supported lodgings?

Supported lodgings describes a situation where a young person lives with a family or individual who has a spare room and is willing to provide informal guidance and practical assistance to the young person who, otherwise, lives independently.

The Supported Lodgings Provider does not have parental responsibility for the young person. However, she/he does have responsibility for supporting their progress, reporting any concerns to the young person's social worker and making regular contact with the Supported Lodgings worker.

What will the young people in Supported Lodgings be like?

Like all groups of people, young people in this scheme will all be different – including disabled, black, white, gay and straight young women and men, with diverse needs and backgrounds. What they have in common is the need for a safe place to live, offering the right balance between support and freedom to enable them to develop skills for independent living. Each placement will be negotiated and the aims agreed, and we will try to match their needs with your strengths.

Some of the young people will have been in care either in foster care or a children's home, others will be in a situation where they can no longer live with their own family, possibly due to parental ill health, relationship breakdown or abuse.

It is expected that most of the young people choosing supported lodgings will be in work, education or training or be committed and motivated to become so.

The scheme is *not* designed for young people who:

- Are currently involved in serious drug or alcohol misuse
- Have serious mental health problems
- Are habitually violent or exhibit extreme challenging behaviour
- Are currently involved in serious criminal activity
- Have significant learning difficulties

Some of them may have committed minor offences, used drugs recreationally, have minor learning difficulties or be emotionally vulnerable and erratic.

How long will the young person stay?

This will vary according to the needs and abilities of each young person and on an assessment of their readiness to move on to independent accommodation. Supported lodgings are not intended as permanent accommodation, the maximum length of time would be 18 months to 2 years. We would try to ensure that moving out is as planned and positive as moving in. Before the young person moves in, the length of their stay and a moving on plan will be discussed. These plans can be reviewed and altered as necessary, via negotiation and discussion.

Who can apply?

The Supported Lodgings Project seeks to recruit people from the whole community. You can be considered as a Provider if you are:-

- A home owner or rent your house
- Parents and grandparents or child-free
- From any ethnic or cultural background
- Single or married – male or female
- Couples of the same or different sex
- In or out of paid work or retired
- A person with disabilities

You will need:

- A spare room
- An understanding and respect for young people
- An ability to interact with young people fairly, honestly, openly and objectively
- A calm, relaxed and friendly attitude
- A sense of humour
- An ability to work with Supported Lodgings workers and Social Workers as part of a team
- To be able to keep information concerning the young person confidential
- To believe that everyone has the right to equal opportunities in life, regardless of gender, sexuality, age, disability, culture or religion
- To be fit and healthy, as the task can be physically demanding as well as being highly rewarding
- To participate in the assessment and statutory checks process
- To ensure that your accommodation is suitable via our health and safety checklist
- To complete an Enhanced CRB Disclosure
- Prepared to attend appropriate training courses

What does the task involve?

Following approval you will initially be required to sign a Contract with Dorset County Council, which primarily outlines the quality, standards and regulation of support services offered by you. Public Liability Insurance for up to £5 million is covered for providers by Dorset County Council.

You will rent a room to a young person between the ages of 16 and 25 years old. The young person must have a separate bedroom and normally a front door key. They will share your kitchen, bathroom, sitting room and facilities subject to negotiation. Some providers may have a self-contained flat or annexe adjoining the property which may be used for more independent young people. Each young person will need to sign a Licence Agreement to confirm their rent arrangements.

As well as providing a room you will offer practical and emotional support depending on their needs. A Support Plan will be drawn up for the young person at an initial meeting involving the Social Worker, Supported Lodgings worker, you and the young person. This will identify the support you give to the young person and their role in ensuring they access this support and take on tasks for themselves. The Support Plan will be reviewed regularly. In addition, you will be expected to keep a daily log of the support you are giving. Any complaints or representations by the young person will need to be recorded by you. You will also be required to carry out regular Health & Safety checks on your property.

Standards relating to advice and support

The provider will normally live on the premises.

A responsible adult must be easily accessible at night.

Structured advice and guidance should be available to the young person alongside the Support Plan.

The provider must be willing to work with Children's Services and other organisations.

Any concerns should be reported to the Social Worker and Supported Lodgings Worker immediately, or to the Out of Hours Service.

The Log Book should be kept up regularly and all complaints recorded and appropriate action taken where required.

What support would I receive?

Once approved as a lodgings provider and a young person moves in, there is a range of support available to ensure you get the assistance you need when you need it.

Support visits with the Supported Lodgings worker will be on a regular basis, at least once per month, to discuss how the role is going for you and the young person.

Each young person will have their own keyworker - which may be a child care or leaving care social worker, a Connexions worker, a mental health worker, etc - with whom they will have regular contact. Monthly Health & Safety checks will also be completed by the Supported Lodgings worker and you.

Emergency out of office hours support and advice is available from the Children's Services Out of Hours team.

Dorset County Council also provide Public Liability Insurance cover for you, up to £5 million.

How does Supported Lodgings differ from Foster Care?

In Supported Lodgings the emphasis is on supporting the young people towards independent living. It is a transitional period of up to two years, where the young people should be encouraged and supported to look after themselves. The expectation is that by the time they leave Supported Lodgings, they will be better prepared to live in private rented or housing association accommodation. It is an outward looking and moving on approach, rather than the caring role of foster care.

How will a young person be placed with me?

Each young person is assessed individually by their keyworker, who will complete a referral and Risk Assessment, with the consent and signature of the young person. Where appropriate, a Supported Lodgings worker will then complete a Referral Visit with any young person who has requested a move to supported lodgings. This visit enables the worker to ensure that the young person is fully aware of the ethos and support available from this housing option and that they are willing to accept this support in order to achieve some of their long-term goals. Following this visit, the Supported Lodgings Team co-ordinator will assess any suitable vacancies in the project, which match with the young person's needs and wishes. The young person's referral and risk assessment will be fully discussed with any suitable providers and then visits will be arranged, which give the provider and young person the chance to meet each other and view the housing available, before making any decisions. Both the provider and the young person have open choices in whether they accept each other for a placement to go ahead. The Supported Lodgings Team Co-ordinator will assess the level of support charges appropriate to the young person in line with the guidelines. Before a placement is agreed the Supported Lodgings Provider will be made aware of the level of support charges offered.

Is that the only payment received?

No, on top of the Support Charges the young person will be expected to pay a weekly rent and an agreed amount towards food and utilities. If the young person is on benefits or Training Allowance, the rent will be paid through Local Housing Allowance. These payments will be agreed and signed in the Licence Agreement.

How do I get paid?

Once the Support Charges have been agreed, you will be paid monthly in advance. If your placement starts in the middle of a payment run, your charges will be backdated. If the placement finishes in the middle of the month, you will be expected to pay back any overpayment.

What do I do about Council Tax?

Once the young person becomes 18 they will be liable for Council Tax. If you normally pay for the house we would anticipate that you would continue to do so. If you are on Single Person Reduction, this should be discussed to see whether the

young person is able to make up any short fall. Young people on Housing Benefit can also claim Council Tax Benefit.

Will I have to pay tax?

It is the responsibility of individual providers to declare any earnings as part of their tax assessment. It would be advisable to discuss your plans around providing supported lodgings with your local Inland Revenue office.

How do I become a Supported Lodgings Provider?

1. Complete and return the application form.
2. The Supported Lodgings Team Co-ordinator will then arrange an initial home visit to discuss becoming a Supported Lodgings Provider and to explain the assessment and approval process. This will help you decide if the task is what you want and to explore if you have the necessary experience and skills.
3. The applicant/s and those living in the household 'who will have significant contact with a young person' give written permission for statutory checks to be undertaken. (Applicant/s must be able to produce proof of identity, birth and marriage/divorce, etc). Two references will need to be taken up as well as medical and NSPCC checks. If you have had previous military involvement then a SSAFA check will be completed.
4. While awaiting the results of these checks, further meetings will be arranged to identify the applicant's skills and experience and to enable applicant's to examine their attitudes and values across a range of issues relevant to living with and supporting young people. During this time a health and safety report will be compiled and an assessment of you as providers completed. You will also be given the Dorset County Council Supported Lodgings Provider contract and job specification to look at and discuss.
5. On completion of an assessment, a full report including the health and safety checklist will be submitted for approval and you will be invited for interview at Supported Lodgings.

When all the statutory checks are successfully returned and if your application is successful beyond the interview stages then you will be an approved provider. A Contract letter and insurance details will be issued to you from Dorset County Council.

You will receive a provider file, which includes all the relevant policies, procedures and forms you will need for your support services, and a Log Book. The Supported Lodgings worker will meet with you to prepare for your first placement and will contact you if a referral is received which may suit your placement.

All the details of the referral and the plan for the placement will be discussed with you. If you decide to proceed, a further meeting will be arranged between you, the young person and their keyworker.

You and the young person will be given time for reflection, if you both decide to proceed, then a moving in date will be agreed and Support Plan meeting arranged. You and the young person will also sign a Licence Agreement around the housing arrangement.

To conclude.....

The role of supported lodgings provider is a rewarding, challenging and variable one. Our existing providers find their role to be positive and fulfilling and provide excellent feedback about the support they receive and the project in which they work.

We are very proud of the project and value the excellent support given by our providers. We have also reflected good outcomes for young people in the fact that our team statistics show there is a high figure of planned move-ons for young people and a low rate of unplanned moves or evictions.

If you are keen to discuss this role further then please don't hesitate to contact us or request and complete an application form.

We look forward to hearing from you!

For West enquiries please contact 01305 228200 and for East enquiries please contact 01202 889969.