

- * they would value support from adults, but acknowledge that their almost universal history of inconsistent and abusive relationships in the past, means that trust is difficult to establish;
- * their friends are a vital source of money, shelter and support in their chaotic lifestyles, but they recognise that they may at times exert a negative influence when trying to escape anti-social behaviour;
- young peoples' thinking is usually structured around a particular locality, and they are reluctant to access services outside the locality.

Above all, young homeless people stressed the need for quality time: to be heard, valued and supported.

The challenge that staff in the North East London Probation Service now face is to balance reactive work [i.e. working almost exclusively with young people already captured by the criminal justice system] with preventative work. They are currently trying to secure funding to run a scheme developed from the findings of this study: to provide a 'safety net', to guide them back into mainstream services.

The Foyer concept came to the UK from France in 1992. Since then 78 Foyers with 4,102 bed spaces have opened in the UK and a number more are currently under construction. At the time of the 1997 UK General Election Tony Blair and Gordon Brown [now UK Prime Minister and Chancellor respectively] visited Foyers and remarked that by the next General Election there should be a Foyer operational or under construction in every town [of more than 40,000 inhabitants].

The Foyer I run opened two years ago and with 210 self-contained flats is the largest Foyer in the UK. It is situated in Newham in East End of London, an area of great poverty and deprivation. The area is ethnically diverse with over 50% of the population from ethnic minorities. There are more than 130 different languages and

dialects spoken in the borough with people from all over the world living together in reasonable harmony. The race dimension in both poverty and homelessness is, however, significant, with research showing that people from ethnic minorities face higher levels of serious multiple deprivation. This is characterised by very low incomes, homelessness or poor housing, high unemployment and poor health. Newham has the highest proportion of children abandoning education at 16 in the country, although it is now officially credited with being the fastest improving education authority in England. In May the government published its 'Index of Deprivation' this ranks deprivation in the 366 authorities in England, Newham is ranked as the second most deprived borough.

At Focus E15 we accept referrals from any agency [statutory or NGO] working with young people aged 16 to 24 in East London. This includes referrals by the local authority of children leaving their care and young offenders referred by the Probation Service.

In order to secure a place on our Foyer programme, all our young applicants will have to demonstrate they are in serious housing need. For many this will mean that they will have been without a fixed address for at least three months and will have spent the night at no fewer than three different locations during this period. This criteria is not our only one: half the flats in the Foyer are for young women, many of whom are escaping physical and/or sexual abuse at home, but where circumstances make it almost impossible for them to leave home for anything more than a few days at a time. One fact also emerges as almost universal among our young tenants: that is that relationships at home will have profoundly broken down. In addition, most will have experienced poor achievement at school.

To secure a place they will also have to formally commit themselves to undertaking basic skills training in literacy and numeracy, vocational training and lifeskills training, their stay in the Foyer is