



## London Housing Panel

### **Just for Kids Law: Supporting children and young people and campaigning for their rights**



Just for Kids Law (JFKL) works with, and for, children and young people to hold those with power to account, and to fight for wider reform by providing legal representation and advice, direct advocacy and support, and campaigning. The lack of secure and suitable housing for homeless children, families and young people, not only in London but across England, is part of our casework and campaigning work.

The charity works with children and young people to:

- Campaign for their right to have safe and secure housing
- Ensure they get the housing support they need from local authorities
- Challenge decisions which deny young people their statutory entitlements to housing support
- Find housing which is safe and suitable for them

JFKL supports children and young people up to the age of 25 through its youth-led advocacy work, and by providing legal advice and representation as well as youth opportunities. In 2019, JFKL supported 1,032 young people in 31 London boroughs. Its support addresses a range of needs, from housing and social care, to education, immigration, and the criminal justice system. It provides care leavers with advocacy and opportunities support, helping them to live independently, manage their finances and access employment and benefits. 75% of the young people helped by JFKL said that, as a result of its support, their situation had improved and they felt more confident in facing their problems.

Young people leaving the care system are at higher risk of homelessness and are often denied the support they need. Young people can choose to leave the care system from age 16, or more commonly, 18. They are entitled to help from their local authority up to age 25, including with finding accommodation. However, in its casework JFKL sees that many struggle to access this due to gatekeeping and rationing of support by local authorities. Care leavers regularly seek support because they are living in unsafe or unsuitable accommodation, or their local authority is refusing to recognise their legal status as a care leaver and provide them with accommodation at all. During the COVID-19 emergency the team continued to support young people with their housing needs, and have seen worrying cases of evictions, despite Government guidance to landlords. Despite positive cases of

councils finding good accommodation for them, too many vulnerable children and young people are turned away from local authority services or are housed in unsafe and unsuitable places.

From 2017-20 Children's Rights Alliance for England worked with children and young people on children's right to adequate housing, as part of the *Change it!* campaign. Many of them had experienced living in temporary accommodation, including B&Bs, for extended periods of time, in totally unsuitable and unsafe conditions. They spoke out on how this has affected them, and campaigned for the right of all children to have a safe and secure home. Thousands of homeless families and children in England continue to be housed in accommodation that is overcrowded, unsafe, and totally unsuitable, including hostels, B&Bs and ex-office blocks. This problem is especially acute in London, with the highest number of children housed in temporary accommodation. Research by Shelter in 2019 showed that the top ten local authorities in England with the highest numbers of children in temporary accommodation were all in London.