



campaigning for fair access to advice
for children and young people

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Children and young people have major advice needs....

Each year 16-24 year-olds will experience at least 2.3 million rights-related problems requiring professional advice on issues such as homelessness, money and employment.ⁱ

Young people are less able than adults to resolve their problems without professional advice because of their inherent inexperience of 'the system'.

As many as 80% of young people with civil legal problems are in a highly vulnerable group, e.g. NEET, lone parent, victim of crime, young offender, socially isolated or with a mental health problem.ⁱⁱ

....but they can't get advice when they desperately need it

Fewer than half of all young people with serious problems will actually manage to obtain advice – leaving at least a million of our most vulnerable citizens to cope with their problems unassisted each year.ⁱⁱⁱ

Often this will be because

- they are not aware of their rights
- or because existing advice and legal services do not meet their needs
- or, increasingly, because there is nowhere to go for advice in their area

Children and young people's failure to get advice severely impacts upon their lives.....

When common problems that could be addressed through advice go unresolved, young people suffer the consequences:

- 45% report their health suffering
- 40% become homeless
- 34% experience problems in their relationships with their parents
- 19% report their education suffering
- 14% lose a job

- 13% end up getting arrested or in trouble with the police^{iv}

Many more become worried or stressed, lose their confidence, experience reductions in their income, or suffer violence.^v

....and upon wider society

A young person with a social welfare problem relating to housing or money has typically already cost local NHS, housing and social services around £13,000 before finding their way to an advice service.^{vi}

In addition, research for JustRights has revealed clear links between young people's civil legal problems and crime.^{vii}

The cost of the country's collective failure to provide this vulnerable group with the advice, advocacy and legal representation it needs is likely, based on existing research, to amount to around £1 billion a year.^{viii}

This expenditure could be avoided by ensuring earlier access to advice

There is mounting evidence that the receipt of good advice, advocacy and legal representation averts serious adverse outcomes for young people, such as homelessness, criminal behaviour, mental health problems, social services intervention and even death.^{ix}

A recent academic study found that a large proportion of young people reported improvements in their circumstances after getting advice:

- 70% in their mental and/or physical health
- 42% in their housing situation
- 13% in their relationships with parents
- 13% in their education situation
- 9% in their employment situation^x

An economic analysis clearly demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of social welfare advice targeted at young people. A typical advice intervention costs around £100, far less than it saves in health and housing costs alone.^{xi}

ⁱ *The Advice Needs of Young People – The Evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2009.

ⁱⁱ *Heading for Trouble?*, JustRights, 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Young People's Access to Advice – The Evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2009.

^{iv} *The Legal Problems and Mental Health Needs of Youth Advice Service Users: The Case for Advice*, Balmer, N.J., and Pleasence, P., Youth Access, 2012.

^v *Civil Legal Problems: Young People, Social Exclusion and Crime*, Pleasence, P., Law Centres Federation and Youth Access, 2011.

^{vi} *The Legal Problems and Mental Health Needs of Youth Advice Service Users: The Case for Advice*, Balmer, N.J., and Pleasence, P., Youth Access, 2012.

^{vii} *Heading For Trouble?*, JustRights, 2011.

^{viii} Conservative estimate by JustRights based on Government data on the economic cost to individuals and the public purse of unresolved law-related problems (*Getting earlier, better advice to vulnerable people*, Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2006).

^{ix} *The outcomes and impact of youth advice – the evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2011.

^x *The Legal Problems and Mental Health Needs of Youth Advice Service Users: The Case for Advice*, Balmer, N.J., and Pleasence, P., Youth Access, 2012.

^{xi} *Ibid.*