

What's it like to be young and homeless?

Many homeless people are a long way from the stereotype of someone sitting on the street in a cardboard box, says Samia Meah



Samia Meah: 'We are homeless, but we live in temporary accommodation – hostels with a minuscule room or maybe a room shared with strangers'

It is said that the average human makes an assumption about a person within the first few seconds of meeting, and it then takes the brain months to become convinced that those initial thoughts may have been false.

When I say the word "homeless", people normally visualise someone sitting on the street in a cardboard box, looking terrible and perhaps even shouting at traffic. This bothers me as I am friends with many homeless young people who are very far from this stereotype. It bothers me more as I am one of them.

We are a group of people in society that people are often unaware of. We are homeless, but we live in temporary accommodation – hostels with a minuscule room or maybe a room shared with strangers. I live in shared accommodation, with support from staff at the homelessness charity Centrepont.

The people I've met while being in the system and the stories I've heard are outstanding. There are people who have suffered with domestic violence, abandonment, immigration, self-harm and sheer neglect. These are people who did not get a chance to begin life with a fair chance. Yet here they are, my friends who have overcome these devastating situations and have the will not only to carry on but also excel in what they do.

I seem to belong to a group of extremely resilient creatures who are all working, volunteering and studying for a better life, despite the difficulty of doing these things when you are underprivileged. Next time you hear the word "homeless", keep in mind that not all of us are shouting at the morning rush hour traffic.

‘Jonny’, 18, London

I am not homeless anymore because I live at Centrepont, and I am working towards permanent move on accommodation. I'm doing my art and design BTEC course at college and am currently managing my emotnal issues well, steadily re-building my family relationships.

My hopes for the future are to have a permanent place to live, to have a permanent employment, hopefully as a photographer. I will fulfil this by completing my college course. I think the government should educate young people at school about living independently without their parents or guardians looking after them, due to the fact that this could happen to anyone and, without any information, it's a very daunting experience.

• **Samia and Jonny (not his real name) are supported by homelessness charity Centrepont**

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