Point Made: Young parents: how to find education, employment and training after facing homelessness

**Louise:** [00:00:00] Point Made, the Centrepoint podcast by young people, for all people.

**Anna:** Welcome to Point Made, the Centrepoint podcast by young people, for all people. Today we're going to be talking about young parents who are getting back into education and employment after experiencing homelessness or from having a child. I'd love to introduce myself first. I'm Anna. I'm the campaigns officer here at Centrepoint and I love just engaging with anyone who wants to be involved to take action that could be emailing the MP or raising their voice but just making sure that young people get the support they deserve.

**Josh:** Hi, I'm Josh, ex resident. But I am also a Centrepoint worker. I work with the fundraising team alongside the Strategy and Ops to raise funds for our residents and activities.

**Louise:** Hi everyone, I'm Louise. I'm 23. I'm an ex resident. I'm also a young mum. I had my daughter at 19. And I currently work at the Department of Education.

**Anna:** Amazing, thank you so much Louise for being here, we're really excited for this conversation. [00:01:00] So, just to set the scene, Centrepoint have a number of specific services for young parents. Finding a job or getting back into education is one of the biggest challenges that they might face. In today's episode, we will be talking about the challenges for young parents who have faced homelessness in the past, trying to return either to education, employment or training after the birth of a child.

**Anna:** We will be discussing these experiences and also what needs to change to make things easier. But Josh, you're also a parent, aren't you? Could you tell us a bit more about that? That is correct.

**Josh:** The fortunate of being a dad to a beautiful young daughter. She is seven months now. She is a shining angel as far as I'm concerned.

**Josh:** Happy, healthy and beautiful. And my biggest gratitude is that I can support her. If I was struggling back then, I wouldn't have been able to do. I can cater. I can provide as an actual dad and I can actually support my daughter's growth and well being and be there for the [00:02:00] important times that she needs.

**Anna:** Yeah, that's really good. And Louise, you're

**Louise:** a mum? Yeah, she's three, going on thirty. She's amazing. She's like, so, a bundle of energy. She really has helped me for the better and I'm just really blessed and grateful to have her in my life because she made me a better person and I'm going to be able to give her the world.

**Anna:** Before we get into some of the stats around being a young mum or young parent, what would you guys say was one of the most surprising things about being a parent?

**Josh:** Would you agree with how fast they develop and every day is something new? It literally is like When you have a job that you enjoy, it's not a job, kind of thing. And when you have something to look forward to every day in your job, that brings you excitement. So realistically, that's, that's the best

**Louise:** way I could say it.

**Louise:** I think for me, just like, seeing her every day grow and learn and new things, it's just beautiful for me and I'm able to like, show her the world, you know, teach her things, show her things and her [00:03:00] face lights up and it's, it's just really exciting to just see like, Her growth and just wonderful and I'm just excited for everything more to

**Anna:** come.

**Anna:** Oh, that's really lovely to hear. I think as someone who isn't a parent, it's just really nice to hear about your experiences. Your kids sound very, very cute. So yeah, just to give a wider context into some of the research and kind of some of the issues that happen with being a young parent. In 2017, a piece of research by Action for Children was released that found only 1 in 10 young parents went to university, which is compared to 45 percent of young people in general.

**Anna:** 39 percent were only just scraping by financially. And social isolation was also an issue with 19 percent never or rarely seeing friends. And it's no surprise that mental health difficulties amongst young parents were significantly higher. So although this study was seven years ago, we can only imagine what these numbers look like now, with an ongoing cost of living crisis, and when financially it's very hard to make ends meet.

**Anna:** And also, we produced a research report here at Centrepoint called In Her Shoes, which was talking about the experiences of young women facing [00:04:00] homelessness, but related specifically to young mums. and single parent households, the report found that in the UK, the vast majority of lone parent households were headed by women, and it was about 90%.

**Anna:** That 93 percent of lone parent households living in temporary accommodation were also headed by women. That research came from Shelter in 2018. And also that young mums are less likely to be financially well off and therefore more at risk of poverty because they have a greater cost of living, but less time to work, which does increase their risk of homelessness.

**Anna:** We will discuss the solutions to some of these issues and also Louise's experiences because it's really important that we don't just talk about stats but we talk about the reality of them and the real stories behind them.

**Josh:** So Louise, do any of these factors that have been highlighted resonate with you yourself?

**Louise:** Yes, I think being a young mum and trying to obviously work full time but then also having like, childcare responsibilities has been a struggle because when they're under, under three obviously you have to pay for [00:05:00] nursery and You can either go to school, nursery, private nursery, if you still have to pay.

**Louise:** And it is quite a lot of money, especially living in London. My borough has the highest childcare fees in the whole of London. So that's an issue for me. And obviously, you know, trying to sustain full time work and also pay for nursery on, like, one delivery, very difficult. And I left school So I don't have a degree.

**Louise:** Not that you need one to get a good job, but a lot of jobs weren't experienced. And unfortunately, like, I don't have enough experience to get some jobs. And jobs that I have managed to get were like No hours contract, which for me isn't good enough because I need to be able to plan it, especially like nursery You know, you need to be able to put them in at a certain time pick them up and you know I can't do like night shifts.

**Louise:** I can't do like early morning shifts I have to do like in between the day in between like school nursery time So I have definitely struggled to find a good job that pays well and fits for my daughter

**Josh:** And Louise you also mentioned earlier that you left school after sixth form So, was there any challenges you faced re accessing education or getting [00:06:00] into mainstream

**Louise:** work?

**Louise:** Definitely. For me, I dropped out of sixth form in my second year because I was moved into a hostel. And I had to You know, give up my studies because I had to work on. Unfortunately, I couldn't juggle three a levels. I'm working, so I knew what I had to keep the job to pay like, you know, for my accommodation.

**Louise:** And I had to drop out. So for me, that was quite a big blow. I didn't want to leave, but I didn't have like The back in support me in my education. So when I wanted to go back into education when I was 19, the job center were of no help to me. There were programs I could have done like kickstart. There were returned to work programs, but unfortunately, my work coach had no knowledge of the courses I could access or certain jobs.

**Louise:** And I also didn't know that. If you're under 21, you can also get like a burst read to complete your education, even if you've, you know, left. I didn't know about that and that would have really helped me because I would have gone back into education if I knew about that.

**Anna:** That's really hard because I think sometimes like the narrative around it can be like, oh, [00:07:00] like you're just on benefits, like, you know, you're not really looking for work, like you're just trying to receive support from the government.

**Anna:** But actually for you, you've tried really hard and it was the services that you sought that let you down in terms of not giving you the right information. I'm really interested in, yeah, what you did as your first job. I know you said it was zero hours, but what kind of work were you doing and was that?

**Anna:** Now, the work that you're doing currently, was that what you'd aim for? Do you feel like you've been able to still pursue the career you wanted?

**Louise:** No, it's completely different. It was hospitality, so, and retail. So the first one was, I was working at Primark, and I was also working in Silver Service in a five star restaurant as well, like, in the evenings.

**Louise:** So two jobs. And then I did like internships, like traineeships of other, other charities that helped young people who were out of work. So those were like retail, one was in a law firm, like, and another one was in the, like, art museum. And then I'm currently working in the public sector, so it's very completely different turnaround.

**Louise:** And also public sector, public sector is actually more secure in terms of like employability and [00:08:00] the range of things you can do.

**Josh:** I want to add to what you just said as well, because in my experience It's becoming homeless made me change my career aspects as well. I was originally studying aerospace engineering.

**Josh:** I was working, I studied in Macclesfield before becoming homeless and was wholeheartedly believing that was where I would land, that was my passion. A level, I mean, got my A's in electrical engineering, everything that I would need. Became homeless and My perspective and my values, my desires, my goals just changed daily and now it became that I was more business driven.

**Josh:** I think that is one of the main concepts that happens to a lot of people that get themselves back up and are fortunate to be able to get back into work or education. Is the fact that a lot of the time they probably will have a change of ambition and heart and be more dedicated the second time [00:09:00] around than they were the first time around.

**Anna:** Yeah, that's really helpful. And yeah, so we've talked a bit about work, but also with training, were there any training opportunities you had that you feel like has led you to where you

**Louise:** are now? Definitely. So I went out my way and my old foster carer told me about an organization called Drive Forward Foundation and they used to help vulnerable young people and kids in care in London boroughs and through them I was able to do multiple work experience and traineeships which led me to the career I'm in today.

**Louise:** Without them I wouldn't be Working in the job I have now because I had no idea existed because I didn't know anybody who knew about it in my circle. So I'm forever grateful for that charity and showed me what I wanted to do now.

**Josh:** So what do you feel would have made your life a bit easier to access that help or information required?

**Louise:** Personally, for me, there is the lack of information transparency. You know, if you are, you know. In [00:10:00] Jobcentre, you've got a work coach, and you've got a young person who wants to go to work, training, there should be the signposting, and there's a lot of wonderful charities out there, which are small, but they run amazing programs, workshops, so for me, so many charities that I work with now, and I always tell young people about, a But unfortunately, for me, I think it's that gatekeeping and the signposting, like, it's almost as if you have to know someone to get into a certain career, and for me, that wasn't an option.

**Louise:** I didn't know the people that I want, the career I wanted to get into. I wish there was more like a joint up, like, coalition between these charities and the government as well. There isn't that transparency, or, or people don't want to partner up. I hear that. Yeah.

**Josh:** In my experience, so I did my research, I went on Princess Trust, I caught up with Reform Radio and I actually got educated within Centrepoint as well for living, how to read a bill how to pay bills, how to have the confidence to speak to the person on the phone how not to feel intimidated by [00:11:00] factors and the reality that the person on the other side of the phone is A human just like you are.

**Josh:** Yeah.

**Anna:** I think from hearing both of your stories, you know, you've both had to do a lot of work to find the opportunities that would be really helpful for you, especially if you don't have the connections or whether there's like discrimination or just like stigmatizing different people for their like background.

**Anna:** And so I was just wondering, have you noticed that people have like, perceived you in a different way or did it feel like you were presenting as if like life was okay but they didn't know the backstory of like you're, you know, you're a young mom, like you're also trying to get into work, you're trying to like pay bills, that kind of thing.

**Louise:** For me personally, I feel like No matter what someone, no matter what I did, people are always like, Oh, it's not enough. It's like, Oh yeah, you should be working. Yeah, you should be doing that. But then my reality is you know, since I was pregnant, I've been a solo mom. So from day one and had her in the pandemic and those times, you know, had to give birth alone.

**Louise:** I had to go to appointments alone. Everything was sharp. You know, you had to do distance. I was in labor, 18 hours by myself. It was very scary, a very difficult time for me. After I had her, I wanted to get into work. [00:12:00] I did a couple of traineeships with this wonderful the Founding Museum, which are amazing.

**Louise:** And even when I was working, it was like part time. My daughter was like one and a half at the time, and they were like, Oh, it's not good enough, you should do more. At that time, she was one and a half, nursery was so much money, I didn't even, that money I didn't have, and at that age you can't get any, you know, free hours or funding, you know, so that was a no go for me, so it wasn't until she was two that I put her in nursery for 15 hours, and then I took the plunge to apply for the job I have now, because when she was six months I got rejected, So I waited a year, and I applied a year after, when she was two, and I got accepted to the job I have now, and I'm currently there now.

**Louise:** But, if it wasn't for that job, she wouldn't be in the nursery full time, because I couldn't afford it. And even now, it's like, I'm working full time, I'm working 40 hours a week, I can work no more. Luckily I can work from home, I'm grateful, but it is difficult to juggle, you know, I'm not super willing.

**Louise:** Of course I put on like [00:13:00] a front and say I'm fine. I'm okay. Actually. I'm not okay. I'm not fine. And you know, you I think it's difficult that people do judge a lot. I'm so overwhelmed to the point that Yeah, you know, I'd love to take a break. But unfortunately, that's not an option for me. And so when people like it's not good enough, it's like I'm doing everything I can.

**Louise:** I'm, every day I'm fighting the statistics, I'm fighting the odds of being like a young parent. And then obviously living in London, the cost of living is crazy. And then nursery fees went up again. But yet you're still getting pushed back, I'm still getting judgement. And every day I prove that I'm a good mother just because I had her at a younger age or had her less financed.

**Louise:** But, you know, I'm very determined to make it work. I'm very determined to provide for her, make sure she's happy and healthy. So, I personally think people should be judged by their character, not of like their background or their age or stuff like that.

**Anna:** Yeah, well, first of all, just say you're doing an amazing job, and I'm sure you're an amazing mum, to your daughter.

**Anna:** But what you were saying about people thinking you should do more, I guess it's that idea of what you give each day is 100 percent of what you [00:14:00] have. You giving a hundred percent may not look like the same as someone who has a partner that's helping support them, or they have more finances to be able to put your kid in nursery full time.

**Anna:** But I guess it's like validating that that for you is everything that you can give. And it taps into that, like, thing about society where, you know, you looking after your daughter is still work. But it's like unpaid, you know this idea of like what's paid, what's unpaid, but still you're caring, you're looking after, you're putting time in, it's time that you're not putting into yourself, and that takes a lot of like capacity, so I think the system doesn't support women when they're having to do double the work.

**Josh:** From my perspective, I may not know a lot, so I don't want to talk what I don't know, but from everything I've heard and everything that you expressed, you just sound like you're a woman that deserves to be a mother. And not only deserve it, but you've earned the right to be happy about being a mother.

**Josh:** And even from my experience as a male, just watching it, my mum was a single mum. [00:15:00] My auntie ended up being a single mum as well. Dominantly most of the women in my family have became single. And I had to step up at a young age to help support my mum. And that's when I started to learn that actually there's a lot in society that That does not actually provide for you.

**Josh:** No. And yes, you know, for the normal working class and above, you can get access to different things, this, that, the other, but the reality is we're all human and there are services that are supposed to be there when needed. You should be proud of yourself and nothing less, genuinely speaking. Likewise.

**Josh:** Thank you very much. You said that there was a lot of times when you went to people that couldn't help you because they didn't have the support. the knowledge to help you, or the information to help you. So, from your perspective, what would have made it a

**Louise:** better scenario? I think, for me, there should be more knowledge and resources in more departmental work and pensions because there's so many courses, so many services out there, so many ways to get a young person, or, you know, a young parent back into [00:16:00] education.

**Louise:** But then, they're not always clued up, or they're not given the right training, or they don't know about certain things, and I think it's such a shame because Their job is to know, you know, we want to work, we want to train, get back into educational or some sort of training. It's such a shame to be in the right place, but then have the wrong individual guide you.

**Louise:** And I think that my issue was that I was in the right place. There were so many services that I could have really helped me accessed. But because of the lack of knowledge from my work at the time, I felt let down. And so I think it's about. the partnerships between like other organizations and also all the staff having that training to know what's on offer.

**Louise:** So when a young person or young parent comes to and access it, they're supported to, you know, especially when it comes to training and that costs money and also. You know, for us young parents who have childcare responsibilities, there are certain funds, but you have to ask for them. There was a household support fund or a flexible support fund that I accessed to get the job I have now to pay for the first month's nursery fee and to get workloads.

**Louise:** And if I didn't [00:17:00] ask, I wouldn't have learned about it. And so if I didn't have that, I wouldn't be able to do this job because I wouldn't be able to afford the first month, you know? So I think it's about. them being more transparent and also now I think they also pay the first month's deposit on a, the person's nursery.

**Louise:** Which is, I think is really great because then it allows people to work and be able to get the first month and know that their child's going to be secure. There's a lot of people who want to work who are young and have kids but unfortunately school, you know, nine till two doesn't work around the hours and doesn't, they can't afford enough, you know, to pay bills on those hours.

**Josh:** And I would like to really, as well. I've had, when I was homeless, I had someone just say, well, bro, you, you know, you're skilled in this, you're skilled in that, you've been working all your life, just go get a job, bro. Or just go back into education. Or just, like, why are you not doing it? Like, just go ask a favour.

**Josh:** But one of the main problems I faced as to why I didn't end up going back to uni, was mainly because if you left your accommodation to go to education, you had to [00:18:00] leave your accommodation. So, therefore, if you didn't have accommodation in your uni, arranged and paid for, remember, because you have to give a deposit, then you're homeless while trying to educate.

**Josh:** When your educational establishment finds out you have no address or anything, you can no longer stay at that establishment. So then it's a catch 22 before you get left with nothing again. So it's like, well, if I was to follow your route. and be ignorant to my own plight, I'm going to be homeless again.

**Josh:** And that's a lot of the problems, what people don't understand. People think, just go get a job, just, but then there's actually a lot of commentations that block you, when you're homeless, from getting a job. If you just think of a basic application, what's the basic thing that happens on the application?

**Josh:** Your name? Address, yeah. So when you can't figure out that, as a homeless person, you're going to even want to carry on that application? You already feel ashamed. You already feel embarrassed, and you already feel like someone that doesn't even know you. It's gonna have a chance to judge you, and that automatically means you're not gonna get that

**Anna:** job.

**Anna:** And for you, [00:19:00] accessing uni, it would have been really helpful to know if there was anything from university that could have provided help with temporary accommodation, or if you could have had support financially whilst you were still trying to find that accommodation. So yeah, that's another, like, barrier to access.

**Anna:** Yeah, Louise, going back to what you were saying, you've been mentioning a couple of specific examples of where you receive support, and just if anyone is listening and they need to know, like, you know, they want to go tonight and search things, what would you recommend for them?

**Louise:** So, first off, in terms of being a young parent and going back into work, you can go on, you know, the government website and you're able to access, you're able to get discretionary one off payments paid for your child's childcare or nursery for the first month, and you're also able to get a grant from Department for Work and Pensions if you claim one of those benefits at Universal Credit to get money for your clothing or your items for work before you start and also a travel card for the first month as well.

**Louise:** You can, you don't have to pay that back at all. And also, if you are a care leaver and you want to access university and you don't have any accommodation, [00:20:00] there's a grant for three years by the United Foundation will pay for your accommodation for three years. You don't have to pay a penny back.

**Louise:** And also, if you want to know more about, like, the services and support, become the National Charity for Children in Care and Careleavers. They have an advice helpline, you can go on their website, and you'll be able to access all their services. They'll be able to support you in training and education.

**Louise:** And also, if you're a young person living in London Borough, the Drive Forward Foundation can help you in employment, training, uni, work experience, and be able to support you. Yeah, that's

**Anna:** really helpful. Thank you so much. We'll post all those links in the episode bio, so please look them up if you

**Louise:** need that.

**Louise:** Also, if you're under 20, at the start of a publicly funded course or such a school, sixth form, you can apply for discretionary learner support to pay for childcare if you're 19 or over and in further education.

**Josh:** Thank you for that advice. Definitely. Is there a message that you think you would like to share with a government or a message for a young person that you would like to share as well?[00:21:00]

**Louise:** For me, as a young person, you know, if you, as a young parent as well, if you have a dream, if you have somewhere you want to get to, don't give up. Even though people have given up on you, you may feel like you haven't got a supporter, you may feel lost, but you can achieve whatever you want to achieve, you know.

**Louise:** There are services out there that will support you, there are people that can help you. It is all about taking that step, taking that risk, you know, putting yourself out there. It can be quite daunting, but it will be worth it in the end. And for me, especially to the government. You know, you need to do better.

**Louise:** At the end of the day, no matter, 20, 50, when someone becomes a parent and they wanna learn and they want to be there for their kids and they're capable. They shouldn't be judged for that. They should be supported and looked after. And for me, children are the future. They make up 100 percent of the future.

**Louise:** If we don't invest in them and invest in the parents bringing up the children, then the world is not going to be in a great place. And so children deserve to grow up safe environment. And a lot of parents want to support their kids and they want to [00:22:00] work, but you also need to make it workable. You know, if school finishes at 3 p.

**Louise:** m or parents they get off to 5 p. m, how does that work? It doesn't. So there needs to be, personally, a whole restructure into it and also not making education about profit. Nursery's so expensive, yet the workers don't get even paid that much. It's very sad. So if you're going to make it a business, that is disgusting.

**Louise:** Children are not the business and parents are struggling. It needs to be affordable and needs to be thinking about the wider future.

**Josh:** Well, you kind of got me speechless

**Anna:** for a sec. Thank you for that rallying cry at the end about what the government can do. So that research report I mentioned in her shoes does also give a recommendation to the government.

**Anna:** So for the Department for Work and Pensions, the recommendation is that you improve the affordability of childcare for vulnerable young women on low incomes or benefits, to help them to be able to engage in education and employment opportunities. So anyone who has influence or if you do work for the government and you're listening, that is something that we really need to see changed, as well as what's been added by Louise and [00:23:00] Josh.

**Anna:** But yeah, thank you both so much for sharing. We really appreciate everything that you've said, and also by giving your own experience. I know that's vulnerable but I'm sure there'll be many people who will be able to access support more, or feel very heard and seen by what you've said. If you are a young parent, we're adding some links in the podcast description of where you can access support, also what Louise shared as well.

**Anna:** If you are aged between 16 25, you may be able to access advice and support from our Centrepoint Works team, so please check the bio to hear more about that. And if you are a young person facing homelessness, We're here for you and we want to advocate for your experiences. Please contact the Centrepoint helpline on 0808 800 0661 or centrepoint.

**Anna:** org. uk forward slash helpline.

**Josh:** Please continue to support this podcast like. and share. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

**Louise:** And that's our Point Made. That's our Point Made. That's our Point Made. That's our

**Josh:** Point Made.

**Louise:** Point Made, the Centrepoint podcast by young people, [00:24:00] for all people.