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Young people count cost of a crisis they did nothing to cause

Danny Dorling, Yorkshire post Newspaper

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TOO many young people across Yorkshire are facing the devastating aftermath of the recession. Without action now, they will end up paying the price for a crisis which was not their fault.

Nearly one in five is struggling to find a job in Yorkshire and the Humber, which is a huge waste of talent and potential at a time when the region needs both.

Some will be able to find a job as the economy recovers. They are the lucky ones. But thousands don't have the skills, confidence and qualifications to break out of long-term unemployment and poverty.

Alarming, new analysis of UK unemployment figures shows that the number of young people trapped on benefits for more than six months in Yorkshire has almost trebled in the past two years. This is despite the fact that the rate of youth unemployment overall appears to be stabilising – at least for now.

In North Lincolnshire, Sheffield and Scarborough, the number of under 24s claiming the dole for longer than six months has more than quadrupled in the last two years.

This can be explained by the process of "creaming and parking", where young people with the most qualifications and skills are being "creamed" off by employers, keeping unemployment as a whole relatively stable. Meanwhile, those who are the least employable and most vulnerable are being "parked" in the dole queue.

Sadly, young people up and down the country are struggling to fulfil their ambitions this year. Hopes and dreams are being dashed, as the vast majority are forced to scale down their aspirations as a result of the recession.

Thousands of high-achieving pupils are set to miss out on college, as vast numbers of A-level students flood back into colleges after failing to secure a university place.

Our over-crowded job market is also forcing thousands of graduates into

unemployment or less-skilled jobs. In turn, young people with fewer skills and qualifications are stepping down into unskilled work and unskilled workers are left facing unemployment. It's like a game of musical chairs, where there are far too few places to sit down when the music is switched off.

However, it is the young people on the bottom of the pile that we need to be most concerned about. They may have struggled at school or grown up thinking that no-one cares. They worry they will never find work or be able to support themselves, let alone a family of their own.

Many of them are branded as "unemployable" before they are even given a chance. And all too often, they face a long and downward spiral towards poverty, homelessness, drug addiction or worse.

It is these young people who need our help more than ever to escape this unemployment trap. We must not let the recession wipe out this talent. Young people bring so much to our communities – ideas, creativity, energy – so letting them fall by the wayside would be a disaster for the future.

Likewise, Britain simply can't afford to do nothing about this issue. Youth unemployment is already costing a staggering £10m a day in lost productivity, while youth crime costs £1bn every year according to a RBS and Prince's Trust report, The Cost of Exclusion.

Rather than labelling young people as "hoodies" or "no-hopers", we need to support them now more than ever. It is possible to help even the most disadvantaged young people turn their lives around.

It is hugely important to tackle youth unemployment now. If we fail to help young people into jobs, there is a danger they will be locked out of the labour market for many years.

With long-term support and training from organisations such as The Prince's Trust, we can break this mould and help young people progress further than they ever thought possible. Only by stopping a generation of vulnerable young people falling out of the system can we rescue this lost potential and save the economy billions each year