

# Keys to the Future

An independent evaluation of Shelter's  
Children's Services

Newham service interim report



Shelter



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

**Acknowledgements**

The evaluation team would like to thank everyone who gave their time to participate in this evaluation and made invaluable contributions: children and young people, parents, stakeholders, Keys to the Future workers, the management and administrative staff at Shelter.

Cover photograph by Nick David. Other photographs by Matt Cook, Nick David, Claudia Janke and Andrea Testoni.

To protect the identity of Shelter clients, names have been changed and models have been used in photographs.

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# Contents

Introduction	4
Aims and interventions	5
Programme reach	8
Impact and outcomes	10
Lessons learnt	15



## Introduction

This report has been produced as part of an independent evaluation of the Keys to the Future (KTTF) programme commissioned by Shelter, specifically covering the Newham Keys to the Future service. It presents the findings of qualitative research conducted over the past year with the Keys to the Future staff team, parents, children and young people, and other stakeholders. It aims to provide an overview of the achievements of Newham Keys to the Future over the past year and, as such, contributes to an evaluation summary report that covers all of the Keys to the Future interventions.



# Aims and interventions

## Aims and context

The Newham Keys to the Future service aims to improve the educational attainment of homeless children living in temporary accommodation in the London Borough of Newham. It offers educational and housing support, matching children to suitable school placements, organising homework clubs and providing tailored intensive support for children with complex needs.

The local context has had a big impact on the Newham service. Newham is an area where there are very high levels of need and deprivation and the highest number of children living in temporary accommodation of all English authorities. Around 80 per cent of homeless households in temporary accommodation are black and minority ethnic (BME), and 60 per cent of all homeless households with dependent children are housed temporarily. Much of the temporary accommodation is of poor quality, with many families living in overcrowded conditions. None of the families Keys to the Future have worked with have been permanently housed, as this can take up to 10 years in Newham. Within Newham schools, attainment is significantly below national average and expectations are low.

## Interventions

In line with other Keys to the Future services, Newham's provides bespoke interventions designed to meet the needs of individual children and families.

**Table 1: Interventions used in Newham**

Intervention	Parents	Children
Advice, information and signposting	109	63
Engagement with one or more agencies incl. making a referral	36	74
Financial, in-kind support and charity applications	1	39
General support activities	33	48
Group work and user-involvement activities	1	926
One-to-one placement with a volunteer	0	26
One-to-one planned meetings with child	0	238
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>1,414</b>

NB This table is based on data from September 2008 to August 2009. Intervention data was not recorded before this.

Group work and user-involvement activities are the interventions in Newham involving the highest number of children. The service has run a wide range of activities and trips, particularly during the school holidays, and has organised innovative forum theatre and animation projects. The data also shows that one-to-one planned work with children has been a strong feature of the Newham service. Much of this work has been intensive and in-depth. The most frequent intervention used with parents was advice, information and signposting.

The relatively low numbers of both parents and children engaged with one or more agencies is a reflection of the fact that multi-agency working and the CAF process has only recently been introduced in Newham and Keys to the Future has not been involved with this process to date. Also the number of other services to refer on to has reduced during the lifespan of the service, as key agencies such as Kings Cross Homelessness Project (later called P3) and RAMP (a refugee service) have either downsized or closed. Shelter has a partnership agreement with P3 and, when they were operating a full service in Newham, this worked well. P3 supported the parents, helping with debt and housing issues such as repairs and Keys to the Future could focus on supporting the children.

'It speeds up the outcome if Shelter work with the children and we work with the family. That's the most effective approach otherwise the children are still affected by all the other problems. It's important to have a package of support.'

**P3 worker**

## Interventions that have worked well are as follows:

### Tailored educational support

Newham has developed effective working relationships with a number of schools in the borough. It has provided tailored one-to-one educational support to enable children to improve their attainment and has developed an impressive range of resources and activities to engage children in learning. One child supported was accused of cheating on her coursework because her levels increased so dramatically. The service has also been able to help develop better links between parents and schools.

### **Advocacy and liaison with local agencies**

The service has provided holistic support to families, which has often involved acting as advocates. Parents have valued their assistance with getting children back into school and support has included attending appeals hearings. The service has also liaised with solicitors and MPs on behalf of refugee families and assisted families to access what they are entitled to.

### **Involving volunteers in supporting children**

Unlike many voluntary sector organisations, Shelter does not have a tradition of working with volunteers. The Newham service has involved volunteers with running homework clubs in libraries and after school and in assisting with group activities. The partnership with Freshfields, a city law firm, has been particularly effective for recruiting volunteers.

### **Creative group work**

The Newham service has run some innovative and creative group work activities that children have really enjoyed. These have included a forum theatre project and an animation project. The animation film has been used as an awareness-raising tool with local decision-makers.



## Programme reach

The data in this section is based on monitoring data for 264 children supported by Newham Keys to the Future from June 2007 to August 2009.

Fifty-six per cent of the children Newham Keys to the Future has worked with were boys and 44 per cent were girls. This is probably because boys are more likely to be identified by schools as needing educational support, as overall they do not achieve as well as girls at primary school.

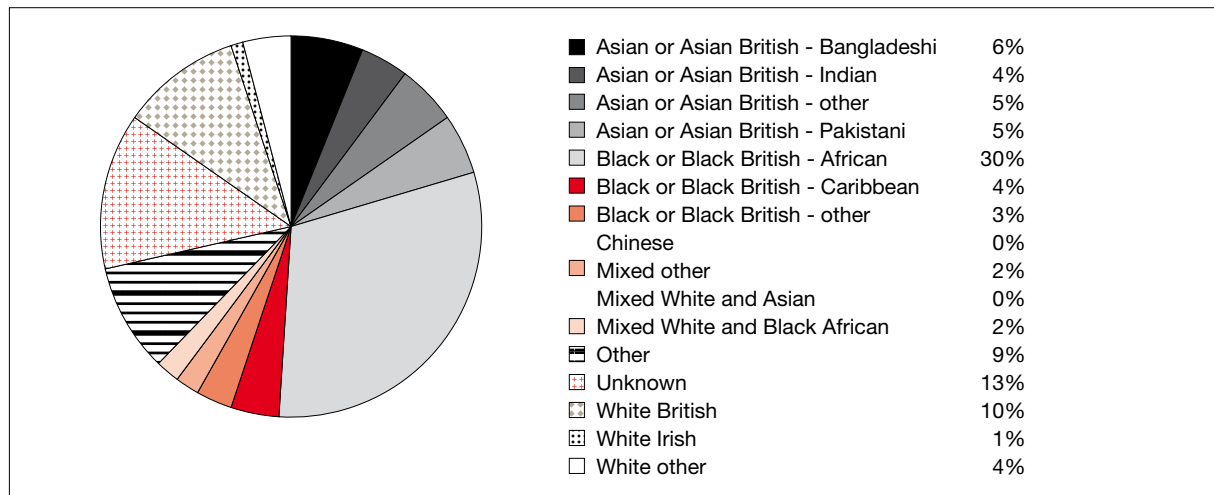
Thirty-eight per cent of the children supported in Newham did not have a disability, but 60 per cent of those worked with were not asked this question so it is not possible to draw accurate conclusions about this.

**Table 2: Age of children worked with in Newham**

Age group	Number of children	% of children worked with
0–5	12	4%
6–12	179	68%
13–16	73	28%

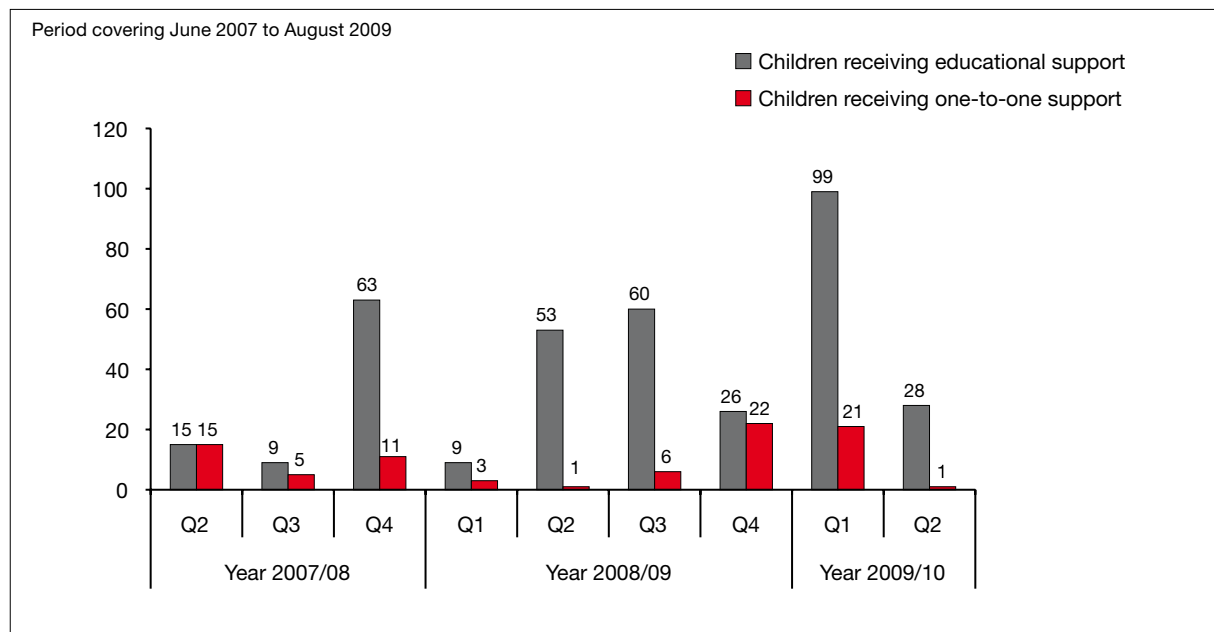
Table 2 shows that the majority (68 per cent) of the children Keys to the Future has worked with in Newham are 6- to 12-year-olds. This is interesting, and indicates a high level of need among children who fall into the current gap between Sure Start and Connexions support services. Keys to the Future has helped to fill this gap in Newham.

**Chart 1: Ethnicity of children worked with in Newham**



Only 15 per cent of the children Keys to the Future has worked with in Newham were white. Thirty-seven per cent were black, of which 30 per cent were black or black British African. Twenty per cent of children were Asian and four per cent were of mixed ethnicity. This shows that the majority of children the service has supported are from black and minority ethnic communities, including refugees and asylum seekers. The 2001 Census data states that 39 per cent of the population in Newham were white, 35 per cent were Asian and 21 per cent were black. Therefore, the service has been effective in reaching black and minority ethnic communities, particularly the black community.

**Chart 2: Quarterly profile of outputs for Newham**



NB Overall project target outputs: 450 children benefiting from educational support; and 120 children receiving one-to-one tailored support.

Chart 2 shows quarterly outputs for children receiving education support and one-to-one intensive support. There is no discernable pattern in outputs. Overall, activity was higher in the second year as the service developed.

The partnership envisaged with the local authority housing department in relation to referrals has not been realised in Newham and most of the service's referrals have come from schools. The high turnover of staff and extreme pressure on the housing department has made it very difficult to build an effective relationship. However, the links developed with schools have been very productive.



## Impact and outcomes

Average risk factors for children and young people (CYP) worked with have reduced significantly. The biggest reductions have been in relation to making a positive contribution and achieving economic wellbeing.

Table 3 shows that the main ECM outcomes the Newham service has achieved are in relation to 'enjoy and achieve' (63 per cent for aims 7, 8 and 9), which is to be expected given the focus of this service on education. Twenty-two per cent of children supported have achieved national educational standards and 21 per cent have been able to attend and enjoy school. Helping children becoming mentally and emotionally healthy has also been a significant achievement. The difficult local context in relation to housing has resulted in a relatively small number of children (six) whose outcome has been around improvements in housing.

**Table 3: ECM outcomes in Newham**

<b>ECM aim</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Aim 8 – CYP achieve stretching national educational standards	25	22%
Aim 7 – CYP attend and enjoy school	24	21%
Aim 9 – CYP achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation	22	20%
Aim 2 – CYP mentally and emotionally healthy	15	13%
Aim 13 – CYP live in decent homes and sustainable communities	6	5%
Aim 6 – CYP have security, stability and are cared for	6	5%
Aim 5 – CYP safe from discrimination, bullying, crime and antisocial behaviour in and out of school	5	4%
Aim 12 – CYP develop self-confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges	4	4%
Aim 11 – CYP engage in law abiding and positive behaviour, in and out of school, and develop positive relationships	13	3%
Aim 3 – CYP choose to live healthy lifestyles	2	2%
Aim 14 – CYP live in households free from low income	1	1%
Aim 1 – CYP physically healthy	1	1%
Aim 10 – CYP engage in decision making, and support the community and environment	1	1%
Aim 4 – CYP safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation	1	1%

### **Outcomes of educational support for children**

Most of the Newham service staff have an educational background and are skilled at working with children to enthuse them about learning. They have run homework study groups in a number of schools, which are highly valued by those schools. They have also been successful in raising awareness within schools of how temporary and bad housing can impact on children's learning.

Children interviewed have been complementary about the support they have received.

'It's been nice to have her as a teacher, she helped me with maths, spelling and money. I look forward to meeting up with her. She listens to me and I can talk to her about my problems.'

**Girl (14)**

## Case study 1: Keys to the Future, Newham Family profile

Amara and her two boys, Reuben aged 10 and Zak aged seven, were staying at a friend's one-bedroom flat in very cramped conditions. Their Dad was in prison. Amara was an asylum seeker who did not have leave to remain when Keys to the Future started working with the family. The school was concerned about the behaviour of both boys in school, and about how they got along at home where they fought constantly. The school also had concerns about their academic achievement.

### Keys to the Future's interventions

Keys to the Future assigned a different support worker for each child. Reuben was helped with his literacy, so that he could write in sentences with punctuation and read better. He took part in the animation project. Zak had support with his literacy and numeracy, particularly his handwriting including how he held the pen, brain gym activities and writing projects. He was involved in a communication and friendship group, which the Keys to the Future worker ran in the school, and both boys attended Keys to the Future trips and activities.

Amara was supported by Keys to the Future (KTTF) to improve the boys' behaviour by setting up a behaviour chart. She was also supported to deal with her immigration status, which included liaison with her solicitor and MP. She was referred to the Kings Cross Homelessness Project for benefits advice, and to RAMP for food for the family and specialist refugee advice.

### Outcomes

'We did reading and writing after school. We used to do activities and then games, art sometimes. It really helped with my school work. We made an animation film. It was kind of scary when everyone was watching it – my class too. But I felt proud – proud and scared too when I went up to the front. I feel more confident now.'

#### Reuben (10)

'She worked with me because I did my handwriting backwards. I'm left-handed, and it really helped. We wrote a story together and I did the words. Now I put my hand up instead of shouting out at school. It's changed what I dream about doing when I'm older – I want to be a scientist or a doctor.'

#### Zak (seven)

Amara commented: 'They helped me to do a lot of things I don't think I could have done by myself. Now I've got my stay. My KTTF worker chased up the solicitor and helped me get my MP involved. They know who to contact to find out about things. They speeded things up a lot.'

'They've helped me deal with the kids. We set up a reward chart and now they behave better. I've seen big improvements in their school work. It helped a lot; everything he saw he wanted to read.'

Both boys are now doing well at school and are better behaved at home. As a result of getting her residency Mum has been able to move the family into a two-bedroom private rented flat and now wants to go to college herself.

## Outcomes of one-to-one support for children

Keys to the Future helped children in relation to all five ECM outcomes by offering a tailored service that meets the needs of individual children and families. Families value the responsive and inclusive way the service had been delivered.

### Case study 2: Keys to the Future, Newham Holistic family support

#### Family profile

The family consists of Pete, his 10-year-old son Tom and six-year-old daughter Jade. Pete and Tom had been asked to leave the family home by the children's mother and were street homeless before gaining temporary accommodation from Newham council. Jade then joined her father and brother at a later date. They were placed in Redbridge, and it was taking two hours each way on three buses to get to and from school each day.

Pete has learning disabilities and cannot read and write, so he finds it hard to support his children with their school work and worries about dealing with paperwork.

#### Keys to the Future's interventions

The Keys to the Future worker ran a family group each week in the library. As well as helping with homework, they looked at safe ways to express and share emotions. Tom was aggressive and Jade had emotional issues related to rejection by her Mum.

Keys to the Future referred Pete to Shelter for housing advice and he decided to apply for permanent housing in Redbridge. The service supported him to apply for school places nearby.

#### Outcomes

They are still in temporary accommodation at the moment, but life has improved and the children are doing much better at their new school.

'The biggest impact was getting the children into a school in Redbridge. He [father] wouldn't have done it without my support. It's had a huge positive impact on the whole family who are much more settled.'

#### Keys to the Future worker

Pete commented on the difference support from Keys to the Future has made:

'Since we split up things have been hard. Tom doesn't like to talk about his Mum. He's been through a lot. He really liked seeing [the KTTF worker] and I feel happy when I see her.'

'Before we had to get three or four buses to school. I had to stay in the park and wait for them all day because it wasn't worth going back. She helped me get them into school here.'

'She helped me with Tom's homework in the library – that was nice. Tom has changed but he still has his temper. The school here have picked up that he has special needs and he's going to a special school in September.'

'Now I feel like a proper family, I've got things I never had before. Since I've lived here my life has been good – it's my home.'

## Outcomes of user-involvement and group activities for children

The Newham service has run a number of activities and trips, including during the school holidays. This has been valued by schools, particularly support for families over the long summer holidays.

‘If you can’t improve the housing situation for families then at least you can take the children out of that environment and give them something positive to do.’

**Keys to the Future worker**

### Case study 3: Keys to the Future, Newham Keeping children safe and in school

#### Family profile

The family, Mum (Vanessa), Dad and their 11 children, were living in a permanent council house in Newham. Their teenage son and the father were stabbed in a near fatal attack outside the house, causing the family to flee the property where they no longer felt safe. They stayed with Vanessa’s sister for several months, sleeping on the floor, until they were placed in emergency hostel accommodation. The children had not attended school for four months, because the people who carried out the attack had made threats against the whole family. Vanessa was stressed and described herself as being at breaking point.

#### Keys to the Future’s interventions

The intensive support given to this family did not involve one-to-one work with the children. Keys to the Future provided school admission support for five of the children, first to appeal for new school places in Newham and then once the family were rehoused, to get school places in Redbridge. One child was not offered a place at all so Keys to the Future supported Vanessa to attend the appeals panel, which was successful. The service also involved the children in activities during the holidays and did multi-agency liaison with the educational psychologist and Education Welfare Officers (EWOs), and helped Mum to deal with one of her daughters being bullied.

#### Outcomes

The family are still in temporary accommodation but it is suitable and large enough for them. They feel safe and the children are all attending and enjoying school. Vanessa says the support from Keys to the Future has made a big difference: ‘KTTF provide a great service for families like us with long-term problems. They’re there for you more than anybody else. I called my social worker, and health visitor and I asked the EWO for help. All they were doing was assessments with me. I didn’t get any help until KTTF came along. The support they’ve given me is the best I’ve ever had. If she hadn’t come along I don’t think I’d be here today.’

‘She helped me get the children into school and took them out on trips, they loved that. We were all still traumatised (after the stabbing) and she helped me with the paperwork and wrote letters. I couldn’t have done it on my own.’

Two sisters within the family, aged 13 and 11, commented: ‘We went on trips to the cinema and to a club after school. There were all different activities and it was fun. We made a bird and cartoon characters, and there was a painter, and we got to make a mess with the paint and it didn’t matter. We got to know other kids too.’

‘Our house is bigger and we feel safer here. In Stratford we didn’t feel safe and we never went out.’

Innovative and interesting user-involvement activities have helped to boost children’s confidence, self-esteem and aspirations. The involvement of volunteers in these activities has helped to provide positive role models for children.



## Lessons learnt

Newham Keys to the Future has developed a range of effective interventions that have improved the outcomes for children and families.

Learning about what has worked in Newham includes the following:

### **Partnership with schools**

The Newham service has developed effective partnerships with schools and has been successful in raising awareness of the needs of children in temporary accommodation within schools in the borough. Questions about this have now been added to school admission forms as a result of the work of Keys to the Future. This legacy will last beyond the lifetime of the service.

### **Volunteer support**

The involvement of volunteers in supporting children with learning and group activities was innovative within Shelter. Links with a city law firm have been beneficial in raising children's aspirations and providing positive role models.

## **Holistic support for children and families**

Holistic and in-depth support for families has been a key success factor. Improving outcomes for children has involved working intensively with the parent to resolve their immediate issues and enable them to refocus on the needs of their children. Joint work with P3 was effective in this respect, as they could support the parents and Keys to the Future could support the children.

## **Building trust and being responsive**

The high levels of poverty and deprivation in Newham mean that many of families Keys to the Future has worked with have complex and multiple needs. Shelter has been effective in gaining the trust of marginalised and vulnerable families, including refugees and asylum seekers. It has provided a tailored and responsive service to meet their needs, which has included working with families for a year or more if they have ongoing needs.

## Until there's a home for everyone

We are one of the richest countries in the world, and yet millions of people in Britain wake up every day in housing that is run-down, overcrowded, or dangerous. Many others have lost their home altogether. Bad housing robs us of security, health, and a fair chance in life.

Shelter helps more than 170,000 people a year fight for their rights, get back on their feet, and find and keep a home. We also tackle the root causes of bad housing by campaigning for new laws, policies, and solutions.

Our website gets more than 100,000 visits a month; visit [shelter.org.uk](http://shelter.org.uk) to join our campaign, find housing advice, or make a donation.

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Please support us.

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Registered charity in England and Wales (263710)  
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