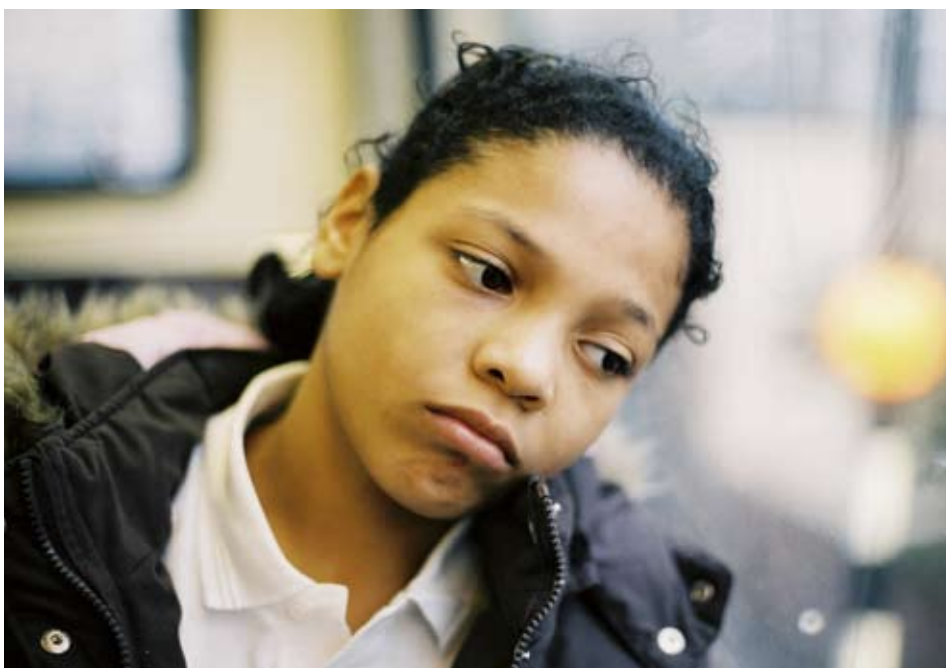


Making policy and practice work for homeless children

Homeless children are an invisible group – all too often ignored by national policy, sidelined by local authorities and a low priority for front-line services.

Our team of policy co-ordinators aims to change all that.

They will work as champions for homeless children right across the country. Their work is a key element of our Keys to the Future programme. By campaigning to make improvements for children permanent – fixed in policy and practice everywhere from central government to front-line services – they will help end child homelessness for good.



Photos: Matt Cook

Starting in 2007, Keys to the Future will:

- create six groundbreaking projects that prevent or alleviate the most devastating effects of child homelessness
- use the evidence we gain from these projects to press for policy and practice changes that improve the lives of homeless children everywhere
- challenge unfair practice in court to create precedents in law that put homeless children first.

Through our ground-level projects, Keys to the Future will get desperately needed help to homeless children straight away. But our ultimate aim is to end child homelessness. To achieve this, we need to go beyond the children benefiting directly from our projects.

We need to create lasting change.



Keys to the Future aims to leave a legacy of improved policy and practice that will bring permanent improvements to children's lives.

Shelter Keys to the Future

How will we do this?

Our team of seven policy co-ordinators in England and Scotland will look for good practice that works to benefit all homeless children. The evidence from our own six Keys to the Future projects will be a key element in this. Each project is being independently evaluated, and we will use the results as powerful evidence to campaign for change.

Our projects in Scotland and London will show how to support the education of homeless children, who miss out on far too much of their learning because of the disruption and stress of moving between temporary housing.

Projects in South Yorkshire and Gloucestershire will demonstrate

how to prevent young people from becoming homeless, when young people who have first-hand experience of homelessness take a compelling message to others.

Projects in Bristol and Merseyside will provide a simple model for housing departments to make sure homeless children are visible in the system, that their needs are taken into account when housing decisions are made for their families, and that they get the support they need.

Our policy team will take this evidence of what works for homeless children – and the evidence of good practice that already exists – out to the country, to make sure it becomes routine to work with homeless children in this way.

Who will we be working with?

Our team will work with everyone who can influence the lives of homeless children – from top-level decision-makers in government to service providers on the ground. Co-ordinators will work:

- at national level, to influence government policy
- with local authorities, whose policies have a direct impact on the lives of homeless families and children, and
- with front-line services that provide direct support to homeless children.

What are we trying to achieve?

We aim to end child homelessness. To achieve this, we need the right framework of policy and law in place. Our policy co-ordinators aim to get results in nine key areas that will make a real difference.

- 1 Children in homeless families are too often ignored by housing departments, who focus on the adults in the family. We want a new duty on local authorities to make sure they assess, understand and meet the needs of all the children in homeless families.
- 2 The Government's ambitious Every Child Matters programme for the well-being of children doesn't recognise the specific needs of homeless children. We want to make sure they are recognised at the very top of policy.
- 3 The way local authorities are structured has a direct impact on the lives and well-being of homeless children. We want housing departments and children's services to work closely together for the benefit of children.
- 4 Children's Centres are an imaginative new initiative to get important front-line services to families who need them all over the country. We want them all to have a trained member of staff who can advise and help homeless families.
- 5 When local authorities evict families for antisocial behaviour, all the children in the family suffer. We want local authorities to take children's needs for a safe and secure home into account.
- 6 Families deemed intentionally homeless often lose out on essential support. We want to make sure such families are supported to keep their tenancies, so that children are not left adrift.
- 7 Homeless 16- and 17-year-olds are especially vulnerable and often slip through the net. We want an additional duty on local authorities to make sure they are housed and supported.
- 8 When homeless families are moved, children are often placed far from school. They often miss weeks of their education as a result of moving school or face exhausting distances from their new housing. We want a new duty on local authorities to avoid this damaging disruption to children's schooling.
- 9 One of the most effective ways to prevent young people from becoming homeless is to employ peer educators – other trained young people who have experienced homelessness themselves. We want all local authorities to be funded to create peer education services and other support services.

Our policy co-ordinators will champion the needs of homeless children to achieve lasting change.