

Child support project, Bristol

Project dates: 2007–2010

Homeless children's needs are often ignored when housing decisions are made. This project will help housing departments routinely consider the needs of these 'invisible' children.

Children are being sidelined

Homeless children face huge disadvantages: cramped conditions, nowhere to bring friends after school or do homework, uncertainty and isolation that seriously affect their physical and mental health.

Yet the system is sidelining them. There is no duty on the local authority to assess their needs. This means they are not taken into account when families are found temporary or permanent housing, and they are missing out on the vital support that's there for other vulnerable children.

We aim to put that right. A dedicated team will support Bristol's housing department to thoroughly assess the needs of every homeless child in the city. As a result, these children will become visible to the housing system, and they will get the support and specialist services they need for a better future.



Photo: Claudia Janke

Homeless children are three to four times more likely to suffer anxiety and depression.

We aim to ensure that every homeless child in Bristol is assessed – helping 900 children live happier, healthier lives.

Project summary

- Homeless children suffer high levels of anxiety and depression, as well as behavioural problems that can seriously affect their future life chances.
- Despite this, their needs are not being taken into account when families are being housed or moved.
- This project aims to make sure the needs of homeless children are systematically identified.
- We will take a lead role in managing and co-ordinating the agencies involved in a child's life so children get the maximum benefit.
- We will work directly with children to help them make friends and build confidence – so they can begin to enjoy and achieve at school.

Shelter Keys to the Future



Taking a child-centred view

We will:

- work closely with Bristol's housing department to make sure the needs of homeless children in the city are assessed
- develop a method of understanding the often complex needs of these children
- help the local authority put this into practice, so each child's needs are clearly described
- take a lead role to manage and co-ordinate agencies that get involved to create a complete package of support for children
- work intensively, one-to-one and in groups, with children in the most urgent need of emotional or practical support.

'Since he started school, this is his third school. He's got a lack of self-confidence, and he's easily distracted because he's never actually settled into a school routine...'

Mother of a five-year-old

Getting the most from services

We want to ensure homeless children do not get lost in decisions taken by local authorities. We will have a team who will work with the housing department in Bristol to help assess the needs of homeless children.

Housing officers can then take children's developmental needs – for schooling, for health and a neighbourhood where they are likely to build a community – into account when deciding where to house families.

We want this to become the normal way of working in Bristol. But also, the assessment we develop will be a powerful blueprint for other local authorities to use to make sure homeless children are no longer invisible in the system.

Happy, healthy and achieving

Trips to the cinema or bowling, creating chances to develop and socialise with other children, are all a part of the way our two child support workers will bolster the most vulnerable children.

Children will be given a chance to express their most difficult experiences through drama, and have plenty of opportunities for learning and play. We will work directly with children to make sure they have these essential building blocks of a happy childhood: the basis of successful lives as adults.



'We are seeing, in the classrooms, homeless children with lots and lots of emotional difficulties.'

Family Liaison Worker, Sam Booth

What we hope to achieve over three years ...

- better physical and mental health for homeless children
- support to overcome emotional trauma, and encouragement and opportunities to learn, enjoy and achieve in and out of school
- local authorities to systematically identify the needs of children, building this into their planning and making sure children get the support and services they need.

... and how

- we will assess the support needs of 900 children
- they will be allocated more suitable accommodation
- child support plans will be written for 600 of these children, and we will take a lead role in making sure statutory and voluntary services work well together to benefit each child
- we will directly provide 225 of these children with one-to-one support
- we will develop a means of thoroughly assessing and supporting the needs of homeless children
- the project will be independently evaluated, creating a blueprint that others can use.

We will make sure that homeless children are no longer ignored by housing departments.