

Providing essential housing advice to families

Project dates: 2007–2011



Photo: Matt Cook

Families in desperate need

Shelter's expert housing advice can be a lifesaver for families with children who find themselves in desperate situations.

Shelter's housing advisers already help thousands of homeless families each year through our housing aid centres. For families who are facing eviction, can't afford the rent, have been classed as intentionally homeless or are fleeing domestic violence, their expertise, guidance and help is vital.

Keys to the Future aims to make sure that homeless children and families can get this vital information and advice wherever they are in the country.

Jenny's story

When Jenny finally summoned the courage to escape an abusive relationship, she found herself trapped with her two small children in one room in a hostel for more than a year. This 'temporary' accommodation proved a lonely, threatening and frightening place for David and Emily, aged four and seven.

With drink-fuelled fights a frequent event in the hostel, the children were not allowed to play outside, but were forced to stay in the small room where the whole family lived, slept and ate.

Emily became more and more withdrawn, retreating into drawing pictures of the home she longed for, and David became dangerously hyperactive, at one point so desperate to escape the confines of the hostel

that he ran out in front of a car. 'It was his way of showing how much he needed help,' said Jenny.

Thankfully, the family received that life-changing help from Shelter.

When Jenny got in touch with Shelter, we assigned her a caseworker, Sean Richards, who immediately got in touch with the authorities to question why the family had been in temporary housing for so long.

Sean managed to iron out some misunderstandings about the family's situation on the council's side, and his many letters, phone calls and meetings forced the council to take action. Today, Jenny, David and Emily are living in a safe and permanent home. The children are beginning to settle in and recover and they are looking forward to a happier, healthier future.

Shelter Keys to the Future



Our housing advisers – fighting for families' rights

Our housing advisers have a thorough knowledge of housing law and housing issues, understand how their local councils operate and have information on local housing options.

They are an essential source of help, advising children and families of their rights, explaining their options and helping them take action to find a secure home. Shelter's advisers are firmly on their client's side, advocating and fighting for them through a maze of bureaucracy.

Our aim is to help homeless families secure safe, appropriate housing as soon as possible.

Making it easy to get expert help

The Government is creating 3,500 Children's Centres across the country. We are taking advantage of this national network to make sure homeless families have ready access to specialist housing advice in their communities.

The centres target families with at least one child under five offering a host of services that can help them and improve the well-being of their children, for example childcare, parenting support, health care, and advice on education and jobs. The first centres are already open, many in the most deprived areas of the country.

Keys to the Future will work closely with Children's Centres so that families who need help can also access expert advice for their housing problems there. Our housing workers will:

- run advice sessions at the Children's Centres
- take referrals from other centre staff
- make sure staff are alert to the problem signs that might indicate homelessness
- build up an understanding among other service staff of the problems homeless children face, and make sure they get help and support.

It is essential that housing advice is easily available when families need it. Getting our housing experts to run

sessions in Children's Centres is creating a new source of help in areas where families most need it. We want to make sure that staff in the centres build up their knowledge and understanding of homelessness so they begin to identify and help children whose families are homeless or whose housing might be at risk.

Families can also get advice, wherever they are, via our free housing advice helpline, or by visiting our housing advice website, a source of practical advice and guidance about housing rights, how to appeal against housing decisions or how to get specialist support.

How many people will benefit

A total of 14,543 children will benefit over three years:

- 6,750 children will benefit from housing advice from our caseworkers to prevent or resolve homelessness
- 7,793 homeless families and young people will receive help through our housing advice helpline.

Expert, free and timely advice can help prevent families from becoming homeless and secure a stable and safe base for children.