

SETTLING DOWN:

preventing family homelessness
through tenancy sustainment

MORE THAN A ROOF: TAKING THE NEW HOMELESSNESS AGENDA FORWARD



Shelter

**SETTLING DOWN: preventing family
homelessness through tenancy sustainment**

Written by Jenny Neuburger

Shelter
88 Old Street
London
EC1V 9HU

© Shelter
March 2003

ISBN: 1 903595 15-0

More than a roof: taking the new homelessness agenda forward

Cover photo: www.third-avenue.co.uk, models used in photo

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	7
POLICY CONTEXT	7
TENANCY BREAKDOWN AMONG FAMILIES	8
RISK FACTORS	11
THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS FOR FAMILIES	12
THE PROBLEM OF REPEAT HOMELESSNESS	15
THE ROLE OF TENANCY SUSTAINMENT SERVICES	16
CONCLUSION	19
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	19
APPENDIX: CONTACT DETAILS FOR SCHEMES	23

SHELTER HOMELESS TO HOME SERVICES

In December 2002, the Homelessness Directorate announced new funding for a post within Shelter to develop and promote tenancy sustainment services nationally. This follows the success of Shelter's Homeless to Home services and other similar schemes in improving tenancy sustainment among homeless families and families at risk of homelessness.

Shelter's original Homeless to Home services are based in Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield. The services were set up during late 1998 and early 1999 as a pilot scheme, funded by the Community Fund (formerly the National Lottery Charities Board) for three years. Having established the success of these projects, the schemes have switched to Supporting People funding and two have received money from the Children's Fund to develop services for homeless children. Further projects have been developed or incorporated under the Homeless to Home service in South Gloucestershire and Nottingham. There are also three similar families projects in Scotland.

Homeless To Home offers a flexible and comprehensive package of assistance for families making the transition from homelessness to having a settled home. Service provision is wide ranging and includes help linking to vital services, for example, helping families access benefits, enrol their children at a local school and find a family GP, as well as practical assistance such as help with gardening and decorating the property. Emotional support includes provision of support groups and outings to help the household develop their own support networks. The projects include a manager, support workers, administrative staff and a handy person.

This model of tenancy sustainment has a proven track record in preventing homelessness. An independent evaluation of Shelter's Homeless to Home service carried out by the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York found that 82 per cent of families with whom the service had worked were still housed nine months or more after contact ended. More than half of homeless families, whose histories were known, had been homeless at least once before they came into contact with the service. There were also successes in other respects, with the projects building self-confidence and teaching new skills to many of the families they worked with. Families valued the service, with 83 per cent rating it as 'really good' and a further 13 per cent rating it as 'quite good'. None described it as poor. Most families felt that the service was helpful, responsive, respectful, fair and caring and that it communicated clearly with them. One service user explained:

"I have been to refuge after refuge since I was 17 ... I've done that for nine years but I have never had help like this... I have never been in a house so long."

SUMMARY

Until recently, homelessness policy and practice has been based on a crisis-driven approach, which has focused on discharging statutory duties with little emphasis on providing support. The Government set out a new agenda for tackling homelessness in the report *More than a roof*, published in March 2002. This stressed the importance of preventing homelessness and recognised the need for support and resettlement services to improve tenancy sustainment.

“Resettlement services can help former homeless families and single people make an effective transition to a new home. Homeless people often move into new properties with few financial resources or personal possessions and may have lost contact with friends, family and other social networks. Schemes that provide practical, emotional and financial help, often combining support from paid staff and volunteers, have proved successful in ensuring that tenancies do not break down. These schemes should be as much part of Supporting People as a homelessness strategy.

The Government should consider the feasibility of targets that measure how effective local services are at sustaining tenancies.”

This report focuses on sustaining tenancies among families, rather than single people, because this has, up to now, been an under-researched and under-developed area of service provision.

Family homelessness

- In 2001/02, 66,510 homeless families with children and 11,580 pregnant women were accepted for rehousing by local authorities in England.
- In many cases, homelessness is the culmination of several problems, such as debt, relationship difficulties and tensions with neighbours. A major cause of family homelessness is relationship breakdown, often involving physical violence by men on women. The number of refugee families in certain areas has also increased homeless applications.
- Some families are more at risk of their tenancy failing due to issues ranging from poor literacy to alcohol problems or severe depression. Periods of transition such as leaving care or leaving prison are points at which problems with a tenancy often arise, for people with children as well as childless people.
- Living in bed and breakfast or temporary accommodation can worsen the effects of experiences and problems that led to homelessness in the first place. Enforced frequent moves, a lack of support, poor housing conditions and placements outside the local area create barriers to resuming a normal life. Children suffer disruption and insecurity and often miss out on health checks and schooling.

- Families that have experienced homelessness once are at greater risk of becoming homeless again. This can be because of a recurring problem such as violence from a previous partner or debt problems, the experience of homelessness, a failure to address wider issues at the point where homelessness occurs or being placed in unsuitable accommodation.

Tenancy sustainment

- Tenancy sustainment services include a range of advice, practical and emotional support designed to help people keep their homes. For families, this means addressing the needs of both adults and children.
- Tenancy sustainment services cannot solve or prevent all the problems that lead to homelessness, but can in some cases prevent the problems from reaching crisis point or provide families with practical help, advice and emotional support to help them cope. For example, helping a woman to disengage from a violent relationship or helping a family maximise their benefit income and sort out their debts.
- Services can be provided to tenants across the private and social rented sector. Most existing services work with homeless families to help them resettle when they are rehoused. But services can also be provided to families experiencing problems with an existing tenancy and prevent tenancy failure.
- Evaluations of existing schemes show that support is effective. An evaluation of Shelter's Homeless to Home projects found that 82 per cent of families with whom the project had worked were still housed nine months or more after contact ended. It is estimated that more than half had been homeless at least once before they came into contact with the service.ⁱⁱ

Key recommendations

- **The Homelessness Directorate has funded a new post managed by Shelter to promote tenancy sustainment services for homeless families and families at risk of homelessness. This should be backed up by an innovation fund to encourage local authorities to develop these services. Over time, this funding could be absorbed within the Supporting People programme.**
- **New funding to support homeless children should either be prioritised through the Children's Fund or made available through the Homelessness Directorate. This funding should be closely linked to the innovation fund outlined above to ensure it is provided within the context of support for the family as a whole.**
- **Local authorities should have targets to improve tenancy sustainment in their local area. This should include rates of eviction by private and social landlords and rates of abandonment in the temporary housing sector as well as general needs housing.**
- **Local authorities should ensure that homelessness strategies include sufficient provision of support services to minimise the risk of homelessness and repeat homelessness among vulnerable households. Strategies should include effective referral procedures for inter-agency work.**
- **Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that homeless children can access school places, including funding for travel expenses where children are placed in temporary accommodation a long way from their school.**

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, it has become widely accepted that single homeless people often have support needs linked to their homelessness. The social and personal problems among homeless families have been less recognised and provided for. Women escaping abusive relationships often move again and again to get away from an abusive partner. Vulnerable families often have multiple problems, such as financial debts and tensions with neighbours, and are caught in a cycle of abandonment or eviction each time the problems become too much. Homelessness can lead to long periods in temporary accommodation bringing with it insecurity, isolation and depression. And children miss out on a lot of the things that are taken for granted, such as friendships and schooling.

Tenancy sustainment services are designed to prevent homelessness. Services include advice, practical and emotional support. Although such services cannot prevent or solve all the problems that lead to homelessness, they can in many cases prevent problems spiralling out of control or recurring and can give families the information, practical help or confidence that they need to cope. Services can be aimed at homeless families when they are rehoused to help them resettle into a new home and community, and at vulnerable families who are at risk of losing their home because of the problems they face. Evaluations of existing schemes demonstrate that tenancy sustainment services are effective in reducing the failure rate of tenancies among homeless and vulnerable families.

POLICY CONTEXT

Tenancy sustainment for families cuts across a number of Government policy agendas. In *More than a roof*, the Government identifies the problem of tenancy failure in the private and social housing sectors and among families, as well as single people. It emphasises the role and cost effectiveness of support schemes and resettlement services in preventing tenancy breakdown and suggests that these schemes should be both part of Supporting People and local homelessness strategies. It further proposes that the Government should consider the feasibility of targets that measure how effective local services are at sustaining tenancies.

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities are required to produce a homelessness review and strategy. Homelessness strategies should include plans for the prevention of homelessness and ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

The Supporting People programme aims to maximise the independence of vulnerable people and to develop their capacity to live in the community. The programme comes into effect in April 2003, bringing together the different pots of funding for housing related support services.

The Government has pledged to halve child poverty by 2010 and end it by 2020. Supporting families and enabling them to stay in their homes has a role to play in meeting this target. Children who experience the trauma of becoming homeless and spend long periods in temporary accommodation are among the poorest children in this country, with low rates of school attendance and educational attainment, poor health and impaired physical and mental development.

The Social Exclusion Unit was set up in 1997 by the Prime Minister to help improve government action to reduce social exclusion by producing ‘joined-up solutions to joined-up problems’. Specific work on rough sleepers, teenage pregnancy and neighbourhood renewal has attempted to bring together the work of different agencies on cross-cutting issues to ensure that mainstream services deliver for vulnerable people. The evidence in this report shows that this is as relevant for homeless and vulnerable families as it is for single people.

In April 1999, the Rough Sleepers Unit began funding voluntary agencies to carry out resettlement work with street homeless people. This work is based on one-to-one support carried out by multi-disciplinary teams, including housing workers, substance misuse workers, mental health workers and meaningful occupation workers. These services have been successful and have achieved their target sustainment rate of 95 per cent. This compares to a normal sustainment rate of 66 per cent among single homeless people. Some of the successful aspects of the development of support services for single people can be usefully applied to the development of services for families.

TENANCY BREAKDOWN AMONG FAMILIES

In 2001/02, 66,510 homeless families with children and 11,580 pregnant women were accepted for rehousing by local authorities in England. This accounted for two thirds of all homeless households accepted by local authorities.ⁱⁱⁱ The most common reason for families losing their accommodation is relationship breakdown, often involving violence. In many cases, homelessness is the culmination of several problems, such as financial debt, relationship breakdown and tensions with neighbours. Although tenancy sustainment services cannot in all cases prevent problems occurring, they can, for example, help women to stay out of a violent relationship once they have decided to leave, or help families in debt manage their budget and maximise their income from benefits, or help to address behavioural problems among children.

Relationship breakdown and domestic violence

In the third quarter of 2002, nearly a quarter of all homelessness acceptances by local authorities were because of a breakdown of a relationship with a partner and seven out of ten of these cases involved violence.^{iv} Relationship breakdown often involves leaving the family home, leaving the local area and starting a new life with very few resources. In particular, disengaging from an abusive relationship is a difficult decision for women who are financially and emotionally dependent upon their partner and have their children to consider.

Women often do not approach the local authority until they are in crisis, although they may approach other agencies and voluntary sector organisations at an earlier stage in the process. The response to domestic violence can contribute to homelessness. Eviction on the grounds of committing domestic violence is very underused. This means that victims (usually women) are more likely to have to be the ones who leave and often spend periods in unsuitable temporary accommodation.^v Also, violence may continue after a family has separated, giving rise to repeat homeless applications. One study found that 70 per cent of women who had been victims of domestic violence were harassed after separation.^{vi} It often also takes more than one attempt for a person to leave a relationship.

Two fifths of homeless families that used Shelter's Homeless to Home services in 2001 had lost their home due to domestic violence and a further 15 per cent identified relationship breakdown as the main reason.^{vii} Clearly, tenancy sustainment services cannot prevent relationship breakdown or domestic violence. However, support through resettlement can provide women with the self-confidence and coping skills to help them stay out of a violent relationship.

Surviving Homelessness Project in Nottingham

This project grew out of a piece of research, which explored ways of breaking the cycle of homelessness for women with children who had experienced repeated episodes of homelessness, often linked to domestic violence and unstable relationships. In 1999 Nottingham Health Action Zone agreed three-year funding for a multi-agency team to provide support to women and their children to help them resettle. Earlier this year it became a Shelter Homeless to Home project with Supporting People funding.

The team members were recruited from different backgrounds, including health, housing, voluntary sector and social work, and employed by different agencies. Support services include a weekly drop in, intensive support packages and keyworking, group work, assisted access to mainstream services and resettlement planning.

Debt and rent arrears

Rent arrears can lead to homelessness where landlords decide to evict or where the threat of legal action causes the family to abandon their home. Data from the Survey for English Housing suggest that a quarter of families with children had rent arrears in 2000/01, compared to 10 per cent of other tenant households.^{viii} Lone parent households that have experienced relationship breakdown are particularly vulnerable to accruing debt and arrears, as their partner may have provided an important source of income. Women fleeing a violent partner may not inform their landlord if they leave a property in which they are sole or joint tenant and often accrue rent arrears as a result.

Tenancy sustainment services can help households to address multiple debts and rent arrears, including sorting out benefit applications, prioritising payment schemes and negotiating rent arrears or utilities repayment arrangements. For example, one problem faced by Homeless to Home service users was that it was often inappropriate for them to move into a new home straight away, with most properties let unfurnished and undecorated. However, on signing a tenancy agreement, families became liable for rent on their temporary accommodation and their new home. Housing benefit can only be paid on two properties for a period of four weeks if the tenant has moved into a new property and is rarely awarded in practice. Homeless to Home helped with benefit claims and grant applications and liaised with landlords to defer tenancy start dates to avoid the accumulation of rent arrears.

Anti-social behaviour

People who behave in a disruptive or aggressive way may be evicted by their landlord, banned from the area under an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) or may move if they are the subjects of victimisation themselves. A survey of social landlords found that the most common complaints against neighbours were verbal abuse and noise, violence, unruly children and drink or drug related behaviour. In two thirds of cases, the complaints were made against households with children.^{ix}

Anti-social behaviour is often linked to other problems such as domestic violence, drugs or alcohol abuse, mental health problems and other support needs. Children who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse are more likely to develop behavioural problems.^x Home Office research into the use of ASBOs found that a fifth of defendants had drug abuse problems, one in six had alcohol problems and a significant minority had been excluded from school, had learning disabilities, had been in care or had a history of contact with the criminal justice system.^{xi}

Tenancy support services, such as Shelter's Inclusion Project, work with households accused of anti-social behaviour to identify and attempt to address the unmet support needs that often underlie behaviour that causes difficulties to neighbours, landlords and households themselves.

Shelter Inclusion Project

The Shelter Inclusion Project, based in Rochdale was set up in September 2002 to provide support to households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to alleged anti-social behaviour. The project works with adults and children, providing a range of support. Most of these households are families and in many cases, it is the children rather than the parents that are perpetrators. The service tries to work with parents and children in the household and address the causes of their behaviour. Support covers educational issues, emotional support and counselling, parenting and accessing social and recreational activities locally.

Poor housing conditions

Poor housing conditions, overcrowding and loss of assured shorthold private tenancies are common reasons for family homelessness. Poor housing conditions can contribute to people leaving what they perceive to be unsuitable housing.

Tenancy support can play a role in helping people resolve major and minor disrepair problems. With major problems, tenancy support work can help raise awareness with families of their rights and provide advocacy to ensure statutory obligations are fulfilled. This practical support is often necessary to ensure that families get a satisfactory service. Practical advocacy at these times is coupled with emotional support, as the process of dealing with repair services can lead to high levels of frustration and anxiety.

Shelter Homeless to Home handy person schemes

The role of Homeless to Home handy person schemes is pivotal in enabling families to resolve minor disrepair problems that may not fall within the statutory duties of landlords, but are needed to maintain safety within the home, for example, helping to put up child gates to prevent children falling down stairs or showing adults how to fix amenities. A handy person and volunteers can also help with jobs such as decorating and gardening, helping to make a property feel like a home. Some families simply need the means to improve their home themselves through the loan of equipment such as ladders, paint brushes and gardening tools. This aspect of the Homeless to Home scheme is not funded through Supporting People.

RISK FACTORS

Some families are more at risk of losing their homes than others. Risk factors such as depression or alcohol problems can damage a family's lifestyle and health, affecting their ability to sustain their tenancy. Periods of transition are often times when problems with a tenancy can arise. An important part of tenancy sustainment work is recognising the complex needs of homeless and vulnerable families and helping them to access other support services needed to address their problems. Tenancy sustainment schemes can identify gaps in local services for families with multiple needs and help generate momentum for these gaps to be addressed. Also, good links with agencies and institutions that are involved with families at risk of homelessness, for example social services Leaving Care teams, can help to prevent homelessness.

Alcohol and drug abuse

Alcohol abuse is a common reason for problems within a family ranging from drunken violence directed toward a partner or children, to financial problems caused by compulsive purchase of alcohol. In 2000, it was estimated that nearly a million children live in households where one or both parents drink excessively.^{xii} It is estimated that between 60 and 70 per cent of men who assault their partners do so under the influence of alcohol.^{xiii}

Drug or alcohol problems are not confined to the perpetrators of violence and can contribute to tenancy failure in ways other than relationship breakdown. Alcohol and drug problems can impact on key daily activities such as preparing meals, paying bills and getting children ready for school in the morning.

A third of homeless adults in families that used Shelter Families services in Edinburgh had drug or alcohol problems.^{xiv} A current or previous substance misuse problem was also noted in a number of cases among adults in families using the Homeless to Home services. Tenancy sustainment services can provide emotional support, identify agencies to work with people, provide referrals to counselling or detox and help with practical tasks that drug or alcohol users may find difficult.

Mental health problems and depression

Depression is often associated with the break up of a previous relationship or with financial difficulties. The psychological effects of a violent relationship can be significant, including guilt, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress.^{xv} This can make it hard for them to manage everyday tasks. Emotional support provided by support workers is important in helping people to cope with depression and practical help with everyday tasks.

Leaving care and teenage pregnancy

Young people leaving care have to attempt the transition to independence at a much younger age than other people, aged 16-18 years compared to an average of 22 years. They are also likely to have lower levels of educational attainment, fewer job opportunities and higher levels of mental health problems.^{xvi}

Young mothers that are not supported by their parents are also likely to be vulnerable in a number of ways. One study found that only half of teenage mothers were still with the father of their child a year after the baby's birth, while another found that four out of ten young mothers experience post-natal depression.^{xvii} Without the support of family, the low confidence and low self-esteem associated with these factors can increase the risk of tenancy failure. Practical and emotional support can help young mothers to cope with everyday tasks and develop their skills and self-confidence. Homeless to Home services offer help with budgeting, which is often a problem for new, young households.

Refugee families

Refugee families may be vulnerable in a number of ways including having no experience of living independently in the UK, having English as their second language and possibly having physical disabilities or mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder linked to their experiences. People that were previously supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) face specific administrative barriers to getting help and are often placed in areas where they have no connection and little support.

Across three of the Shelter Homeless to Home projects in Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield, around one in eight families did not have British citizenship and one in six families did not have English as their first language. Many had recently moved to Britain and faced problems settling into a new culture and in accessing services such as housing, health care, training and appropriate support.^{xviii} Some support services are more geared up than others to work with refugee families, with multilingual workers and translators and English classes. Often, practical help with basic household tasks such as connecting to utilities or bleeding a radiator are vital to households without English, new to the country.

THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS FOR FAMILIES

The insecurity and isolation of living in temporary accommodation can worsen the experience of homelessness and the problems that led to it in the first place. Living in bed and breakfast or temporary accommodation for long periods of time, often outside the local area and with

little or no support, increases the sense of isolation, depression and powerlessness that many families feel on becoming homeless. Enforced frequent moving, poor housing conditions, bad neighbourhoods and difficulties accessing services create barriers to resuming a normal life, settling down or getting a job. Children suffer disruption and insecurity and often miss out on health checks and schooling. This can have severe effects on their well-being, health and behaviour, and a long term impact on their self-confidence and learning.

Policy and practice

Until recently, policy and practice has followed a crisis-driven approach to homelessness, often based on meeting statutory housing duties under homelessness legislation and ensuring that people have a bed for the night. At the point where housing needs are assessed and met, there is rarely any assessment of the support needs that are likely to accompany homelessness. In September 2002, there were 84,800 households living in temporary accommodation.^{xxix} The average stay was six months, but more than a quarter of households waited more than a year for an offer of permanent accommodation, and nearly one in six households waited for two or more years.^{xxx}

Living in temporary accommodation

Many homeless families are placed in temporary accommodation outside their local area. This disrupts friendship and support networks and creates problems in accessing services such as schools, GPs and benefit and housing offices. In London, which accounts for two fifths of placements in temporary accommodation nationally, half of households in bed and breakfast accommodation and 16 per cent of all homeless households in other temporary accommodation were housed outside their home borough in March 2002.^{xxxi}

Homeless families that are moved suddenly to a new area often do not receive or know how to access local services. Under the Housing Act 1996, local housing authorities are required to notify each other when a homeless household is placed in temporary accommodation in another district. However, a recent survey of boroughs' notification procedures found that only around half of boroughs making out-of-borough placements regularly notified the receiving borough of placement. Furthermore, many boroughs that were sent notifications did not respond to the information.^{xxii} A study of homelessness and education found that local education authorities (LEAs) consistently underestimated the numbers of homeless children in their area and did not make any additional resources available to schools.^{xxiii} Enforced frequent moves between different forms of temporary accommodation compound problems.

Living in temporary accommodation can lead to depression and stress-related mental health problems among adults. A survey of 113 homeless families staying in hostels in Birmingham found that nearly half of homeless mothers had mental health problems, mainly depression.^{xxiv} A quarter of adults in families living in a temporary accommodation unit in Camden reported suffering from some form of mental health problem, commonly linked to stress.^{xxv} In general, the longer the stay in temporary accommodation, the more negative families become about their homeless experiences.^{xxvi}

Finsbury Park Homeless Families Project

This project has been working to improve the quality of life for homeless families living in bed and breakfast in the Finsbury Park area for over 15 years. It provides an informal meeting place, drop in sessions and a range of classes and activities. Services provided by paid staff and volunteers include health, education and advice sessions, a drop-in centre, playgroup, summer playscheme, after-school club, women's group, general outreach and outreach play services. The scheme receives funding for different workers from different sources, including London Borough Grants, the Children's Fund, grants from London Boroughs of Hackney and Islington and charitable funding.

The impact on children

Insecurity and problems associated with living in cramped conditions and frequent moving can also affect children's mental health and development. A survey of homeless families in Birmingham found that a substantial minority of homeless children (29 per cent) had behavioural and emotional difficulties of sufficient severity to require referral for treatment. A year on, within this group, the proportion of children with mental health problems had increased to 37 per cent. National Health Service (NHS) records from a clinic in Brent found high levels of speech and development delay amongst young children living in temporary accommodation.^{xxvii} Nearly a third of children in families using a Nottingham homelessness service had behavioural or mental health problems including hyperactivity, depression, anxiety and disturbed behaviour.^{xxviii}

For children of school age, moving into temporary accommodation can disrupt their education. Five out of twelve homeless children interviewed as part of a participatory study at the Bristol Homeless to Home project had to change school because of relocation to hostels or temporary accommodation. Some had to change twice, when their family moved from bed and breakfast to other temporary accommodation. More than half of the parents who had to change their children's schooling said that at least one of their children was bullied.^{xxix} Children who have behavioural problems due to traumatic past experiences and living in temporary accommodation are also more likely to misbehave at school and be suspended or excluded, again missing out on education. A study in Birmingham found that more than half of school-age children had ceased attending school since becoming homeless and a quarter of pre-schoolers had ceased attending nursery.^{xxx} A study of homeless children in Brent found that a third had not attended school for between six months and a year.^{xxxi}

Shelter's Education project

This service was set up at the end of 2002 with the aim of limiting the damaging effects of homelessness on children's schooling. A support worker based in Manchester Housing Aid Centre currently carries out outreach work with six families including around 18 children, helping parents to find children school places, assisting with appeals where admission is refused and providing curriculum based resources at home whilst trying to secure alternative forms of education for children not able or willing to attend school. This pilot service is being funded by Shelter in partnership with Manchester Local Education Authority to identify the types of difficulties children experience and to recommend solutions. The evaluation will aim to inform future similar developments in Manchester and elsewhere.

THE PROBLEM OF REPEAT HOMELESSNESS

The ‘revolving door’ of homelessness is a familiar issue in relation to street homelessness. However, there is also strong evidence that families who have been homeless before are at more risk of becoming homeless again. There are a number of reasons why families become homeless more than once:

- women with children escaping a violent partner often move more than once to get away and the emotional and psychological effects of violence on women and their children can prevent them from resettling after being rehoused;
- outstanding debt from a previous tenancy and other sources can lead to debts and rent arrears in a new tenancy;
- moving and setting up home costs and problems with housing benefit can result in debt and arrears accruing at the start of a tenancy;
- loneliness and insecurity in a new home or unsuitable accommodation in a bad neighbourhood can lead to families abandoning their new home within the first few months;
- unmet support needs can lead to the same problems, such as anti-social behaviour, arising again and again in different places; and
- the sense of loss, powerlessness and inevitability of failure that goes with moving in and out of homelessness makes it hard for families to resettle.

Relationship breakdown was the most common reason for the loss of a tenancy among those that reapplied as homeless in Scotland. Insecurity or the threats of violence were often underlying concerns. Debt and arrears leading to eviction were identified as factors. Another common scenario was for applicants to abandon unsatisfactory temporary accommodation before being made a permanent offer.^{xxxii}

A survey of ‘frequent movers’ in the private rented sector in the West End of Newcastle found that in nearly all instances, moves were triggered by external events in which movers felt that they were the victims. A third of moves were due to forming or breaking relationships; a quarter were in order to move away from neighbours and a fifth were moving due to crime or burglary in an area. Some respondents also admitted to having evaded debts.^{xxxiii}

Statistics on repeat homelessness

In 2001/02, approximately 8,000 homeless households - a quarter of all households living in temporary accommodation - ‘voluntarily ceased to occupy accommodation’ suggesting a significant rate of abandonment and eviction.^{xxxiv} A survey in Scotland found that nationally over a quarter (27 per cent) of homeless applications were by households who had previously made an application. Most repeat applications were separated by relatively short intervals of less than six months. The findings imply that more than a third of tenancies in the social sector are not sustained, with more than a quarter of the total ‘failing’ within six months of the letting.^{xxxv}

Records from the Shelter Homeless to Home projects found that more than half (56 per cent) of homeless families, on whom information was available, had already experienced at least one previous period of homelessness. Users of a homelessness project in Nottingham had also experienced high levels of mobility in the past. Most had moved between two and six addresses in the past two years and had been homeless several times during their life and as children. Three people had been homeless more than ten times during their lifetime.^{xxxvi}

THE ROLE OF TENANCY SUSTAINMENT SERVICES

The main purpose of tenancy sustainment services is to help people keep their homes. Although such services cannot prevent or solve all the problems that lead to homelessness, they can in many cases prevent problems from spiralling out of control or recurring and can give families the information, practical help or confidence they need to cope. Evaluations of existing schemes demonstrate that tenancy sustainment services are effective in reducing the failure rate of tenancies among homeless and vulnerable families.

What is tenancy sustainment?

Tenancy sustainment services provide a wide range of practical assistance, advice, information and community links. Services are designed to enable people to access the range of services they need to keep their homes and settle into the community and to ensure that they do not fall through existing social welfare safety nets. They also help people develop their capacity to manage their tenancies and access services for themselves. Tenancy support includes:

- advice and assistance with welfare benefits;
- advice and advocacy in other key areas including housing repairs, access to health services, school places for children and community care;
- practical assistance with moving into or improving a home, such as help with decoration, gardening, connecting to utilities and getting furniture, fridges and cookers;
- social and emotional support through positively seeking to engage families, regular contact and listening and responding to identified needs;
- supporting children in their development, education, health, behaviour and play and also providing support to parents with their children;
- referrals to specialist agencies where necessary or wanted, such as drugs or alcohol counselling, social services, health and school or other counselling for children with behavioural problems.

Not all families will need or want to use all the services provided. Some families will need only limited support for a short period of time, while others may need ongoing assistance and referrals to other agencies for specialist support. The service provided to each household is based on the needs identified jointly by the individual and their support worker. Goals should be set and reviewed regularly to ensure the service is effective in its work with each household. Support workers make regular visits to families in their own

homes, developing support plans with the families and monitoring progress in agreed areas. Most resettlement schemes offer a time-limited service for up to 12 months after a family is rehoused.

In practice, the nature of the work will also be partly determined by the work of other agencies. In areas where many agencies are failing to provide services to homeless and vulnerable families, much of the work will be crisis management rather than developmental work, such as making backdated claims for housing benefit or providing advocacy to get a child a school place.

Who provides these services?

Support can be provided as part of an intensive housing management service by the landlord, or by an independent organisation. Advantages of support provided independently of the landlord include the potential for greater trust between the support worker and the family, the scope to address a wide range of needs and for advocacy on behalf of the family. However, there needs to be a close relationship between housing management and support to ensure that tenancy problems are raised and addressed.

Who are services aimed at?

Tenancy sustainment services can be provided to households experiencing problems with an existing tenancy or to homeless families to help them with rehousing. Services can be provided to tenants across the private and social housing sectors through referrals from a wide range of agencies or through a single local authority or social landlord. Shelter's Homeless to Home services started with different referral arrangements and have developed in different ways.

- The Sheffield project was set up to accept referrals exclusively from the local authority, through tenancy support workers or health visitors to families in temporary accommodation – more recently it also started to accept families in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- The Bristol and Birmingham projects both accepted self-referrals alongside agency routes.^{xxxvii} In 2001, around half of service users with the Birmingham project were self-referrals and nearly a fifth were living with friends or family or renting privately. Family and friends often refer new users to the project.

There are challenges in providing pre-tenancy support to families in bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation, since families are likely to be moved and may be in temporary accommodation for a long period, meaning that the nature of support will be quite different and the level of need higher. There are also challenges in identifying and working with vulnerable families at risk of losing their homes. In particular, households renting from a private landlord often have little security of tenure and housing management is not usually geared up to identify or provide support to vulnerable households.

Links to other services

Linking people up to other services is a major part of tenancy sustainment. Therefore, schemes need to work closely with other agencies, including the Benefits Agency, housing benefit departments, health, social services, probation, education and specialist support

agencies. It is important that schemes also have links with informal community based services such as drop-in, day centre and outreach services that provide a place for families to meet other families and classes or crèche facilities. In particular, it is often important for refugee families to be able to access culturally and ethnically specific community networks.

There are advantages to multi-disciplinary work within a project in terms of user access to a range of services, for example, by health visitors on immunisation for children, health promotion sessions and work on sexual health or teenage pregnancy. Both the Nottingham and Bayswater Families project are set up on this basis. However, it is much more difficult to set up, fund and manage. Performance monitoring for different agencies with different systems is time-consuming. In particular, it may be difficult to secure stable funding for projects that do not fall into a particular funding category and provide something more than low intensity housing-related support. The advantage to the Homeless to Home model is that there is a shared approach to working with families, and that the support role is central to the project.

How effective are services?

Evaluations of existing schemes demonstrate that tenancy sustainment services are effective in helping people to settle and remain in their homes.

- An independent evaluation of Shelter's Homeless to Home projects in Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield carried out by the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York found that of 218 families that had ceased to receive services, the majority were living independently in permanent accommodation. The available data suggest that 82 per cent of families with whom Homeless to Home had worked were still housed nine months or more after contact ended. More than half of homeless families, whose histories were known, had been homeless at least once before they came into contact with the service.^{xxviii}
- An evaluation of a resettlement service for homeless and vulnerable parents in Leicester found that the support team had maintained tenancies in various ways, including addressing debts and rent arrears and liaison with other agencies. The homeless families interviewed expressed high levels of satisfaction. In addition, young families had been encouraged to move into areas which they would not have previously considered, addressing the issue of high vacancy rates in parts of Leicester.^{xxix}
- An interim evaluation of the homelessness project for families in Nottingham found that the short-term outcomes for service users were overwhelmingly positive and that the support was highly valued. Among those intensively involved, women felt that it had made the difference between sustaining a tenancy and becoming homeless again. Service users also observed a positive impact on their children's well being, behaviour and school attendance. Longer-term outcomes were as yet unknown.^{xl}
- An evaluation of the effectiveness of a tenancy support service to housing association tenants, not specifically targeted at families, found that only eight per cent of vulnerable tenants who received support ended their tenancies over a period of 15 months, compared to a fifth of tenants in a non-intervention group (vulnerable households in properties managed by an area office that did not include a tenancy support officer). In addition, the service was cost effective on two financial measures. First, over a 15-

month period there was an average decrease in rent arrears of £203 for tenants with arrears who received support and an average *increase* in arrears of £340 for tenants with arrears who did not receive support. Second, the total average rent arrears per support officer caseload was calculated to be £9,833 greater for the group who did not receive support.^{xi}

CONCLUSION

The evidence in this report demonstrates a clear need for services to support homeless families and families at risk of homelessness. Evaluations of existing schemes highlight the effectiveness of tenancy sustainment services in reducing the rate of repeat homelessness among families. Although tenancy sustainment cannot prevent or solve all of the problems that lead to homelessness, it can in many cases prevent these problems reaching crisis point and provide families with the practical and emotional support they need to cope.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding for tenancy sustainment services

The Homelessness Directorate has funded a new post to be managed by Shelter to develop and promote tenancy sustainment services for homeless families and families at risk of homelessness. This should be backed up by an innovation fund to overcome current uncertainty about the capacity of the Supporting People programme and encourage local authorities to develop services. Over time, this funding could be absorbed within the Supporting People programme.

New funding to support homeless children should either be prioritised through the Children's Fund or made available through the Homelessness Directorate. This funding should be closely linked to the innovation fund outlined above and to Supporting People funding to ensure it is provided within the context of support for the family as a whole. Schemes could be funded on an authority or cross-authority basis. Funding programmes should have flexible monitoring systems and requirements so that schemes do not have to produce the same information more than once over different periods.

Homelessness reviews and strategies

The provision of tenancy sustainment services should be a central part of developing long-term and strategic approaches to preventing homelessness at the local level.

Homelessness strategies need to:

- collect detailed information on family homelessness, including monitoring evictions, abandonment of properties, repeat homeless applications to the local authority and more detailed housing histories of applicants beyond the main presenting reason;
- identify families at risk of homelessness and establish common assessment and referral procedures among agencies working with families;

- ensure that support needs assessments of vulnerable and homeless families are carried out by homelessness departments, social landlords or tenancy sustainment teams;
- ensure the sufficient provision of support services to prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness and have effective referral procedures in place;
- identify resources for these services, including the Supporting People programme and other sources.

Joining up services that work with families and children

The evidence in this report has clearly demonstrated that keeping a home is closely connected to accessing a wide range of services. Homelessness is not just a housing issue, but is likely to be the culmination of several problems. No one agency can tackle all the problems faced by families and children. To prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness, and to ensure that the damaging effects of homelessness are minimised, targets and robust procedures for joint working between agencies need to be established.

- Local authorities should have targets to improve tenancy sustainment in their local area. This should include rates of eviction by private and social landlords and rates of abandonment, in the temporary housing sector as well as general needs housing.
- Local authorities should help establish support needs assessments of homeless families or those at risk of homelessness to be carried out by homelessness departments, social landlords or tenancy sustainment teams. They should also help establish effective referral procedures for these assessments.
- Local housing authorities should provide clear and regular information to homeless families about how long they are likely to spend in temporary accommodation and the location and availability of local services. This would lessen the sense of uncertainty and insecurity experienced by homeless families and make it easier to make decisions about changing GPs or children's school places.
- Local authorities should set up systems or agreements with neighbouring authorities to notify relevant services, including housing departments, social services, education authorities and primary care trusts, of the placement or movement of statutorily homeless households living in temporary accommodation. The Greater London Authority and Association of London Government, with support from the Homelessness Directorate, are currently developing NOTIFY, a web-based notification system in London.
- Local education authorities should monitor the number and location of homeless children in schools and should target appropriate support at these schools. Numbers of homeless children in a school should be taken into account in measuring a school's performance on attendance and achievement.
- Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that homeless children can access a school place, including funding for travel expenses where children are placed in temporary accommodation a long way from their school and support for families trying to get their children into school in their local area.

FOOTNOTES

- ⁱ DTLR (2002) *More than a roof: a report into tackling homelessness*, London:DTLR, p.23
- ⁱⁱ Jones, A., Pleace, N. & Quilgars, D. (2002) *Firm Foundations: An evaluation of the Shelter Homeless to Home service*, London: Shelter
- ⁱⁱⁱ ODPM (2002) Housing Statistics Statutory Homelessness (England) Quarter 1 2002, London: ODPM
- ^{iv} These figures reflect central government and local authority homelessness policy and practice as well as the importance of relationship breakdown as a reason for homelessness. Homelessness Directorate (2002) *Homelessness statistics*, London: ODPM.
- ^v Levison, D., and Kenny, D (2002) *The provision of accommodation and support for households experiencing domestic violence in England*, London: ODPM
- ^{vi} Kelly, D., Burton, S. and Regan, L. (1998) *Supporting Women and Challenging Men: Lessons from the Domestic Violence Intervention Project*, Bristol: Policy Press
- ^{vii} Jones, A., Pleace, N. & Quilgars, D. (2002) *Firm Foundations: An evaluation of the Shelter Homeless to Home service*, London: Shelter
- ^{viii} Survey of English Housing (2002) London: ODPM
- ^{ix} Hunter, C., Nixon, J. and Shayer, S. (2000) *Neighbour nuisance, social landlords and the law*, Coventry: JRF/CIH
- ^x McGee, C. (2000) *Childhood experiences of domestic violence*, London: Jessica Kingsley
- ^{xi} Campbell, S. (2002) *A review of anti-social behaviour orders*, Home Office Research Study 236, London: Home Office
- ^{xii} Men's Health Forum/ Alcohol Concern (2001) *Men and alcohol: information for the All Party Group on Men's Health*, London: MHF
- ^{xiii} Jacobs, J. (1998) *The links between substance misuse and domestic violence*, London: Alcohol Concern/ISDD
- ^{xiv} Sharp, C., Kay, H. & Mina-Coull, A. (2001) *Interim Evaluation of Shelter Families Project*, Edinburgh: Communities Scotland
- ^{xv} Homelessness Directorate (2002) *Domestic violence policy brief*, London: ODPM
- ^{xvi} Stein, M. (1997) *What works in leaving care?* Basildon: Barnados
- ^{xvii} Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Teenage Pregnancy*, London: SEU
- ^{xviii} Jones, A., Pleace, N. & Quilgars, D. (2002) *Firm Foundations: An evaluation of the Shelter Homeless to Home service*, Shelter: London
- ^{xix} Homelessness directorate (2002) *Homelessness statistics September 2002*, London:ODPM
- ^{xx} Meth, F. (2003) *Analysis of ODPM homelessness statistics 2001/2*, London: Shelter
- ^{xxi} Greater London Authority (2001) *homelessness in London 25*, March 2001
- ^{xxii} Greater London Authority (2001) *homelessness in London 33*, December 2001
- ^{xxiii} Power, S., Whitty, G. and Youdell, D. (1995) *No place to learn: homelessness and education*, London: Shelter
- ^{xxiv} Vostanis, P., Grattan, E. & Cumella, S. (1998) 'Mental health problems of children and families: a longitudinal study', *British Medical Journal*, 316, 899-902
- ^{xxv} Kings Cross Homelessness Project (2002) *Report on life in bed & breakfast accommodation*, London: KCHP
- ^{xxvi} Hall, S., Powney, J. and Davidson, P. (2000) *The impact of homelessness on children* East Lothian: East Lothian Council/Tranent Social Inclusion Partnership
- ^{xxvii} Hilditch, S. (2002) *Towards a day centre for homeless families in Brent*, London: Brent Homeless Families Group
- ^{xxviii} Health Action at Crisis (2001) *Surviving Homelessness Project: Evaluation Report*, Nottingham: Nottingham City Council
- ^{xxix} Robinson, B. (2002) *Where's Home? Children and homelessness in Bristol*, London: Shelter
- ^{xxx} Vostanis, P. & Cumella, S. (1999) *Homeless Children: Problems and Needs*, London: Jessica Kingsley

^{xxxx} Hilditch, S. (2002) *Towards a day centre for homeless families in Brent*, London: Brent Homeless Families Group

^{xxxxi} *ibid.*

^{xxxxii} Richardson, K. & Corbishey, R. (1999) *Frequent moving; Looking for love?* York: JRF

^{xxxxiv} Meth, F. (2003) *Analysis of ODPM homelessness statistics 2001/2*, London: Shelter

^{xxxxv} Pawson, H. (2002) *Repeat Homelessness in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Homes

^{xxxxvi} Health Action at Crisis (2001) *Surviving Homelessness Project: Evaluation Report*, Nottingham: Nottingham City Council

^{xxxxvii} The Bristol scheme has since transferred to transitional housing benefit funding (to come under Supporting People in April 2003) and now only accepts local authority referrals

^{xxxxviii} Recent information from the schemes suggests that this success rate has improved across all three schemes with a 94 percent sustainment rate for the Bristol project.

^{xxxxx} Tischler, V. & Vostanis, P. (2002) *A resettlement service for homeless and vulnerable parents: an exploratory study* Leicester: University of Leicester

^{xi} Health Action at Crisis (2001) *Surviving Homelessness Project: Evaluation Report*, Nottingham: Nottingham City Council

^{xii} Torr, G. (2002) *An evaluation of the effectiveness of a Tenancy Support Service*, London: Housing Corporation

APPENDIX: CONTACT DETAILS FOR SCHEMES

Shelter Homeless to Home services:

Birmingham: 0121 240 2150

Bristol/South Gloucestershire: 0117 944 5695

Nottingham: 0115 9693234

Sheffield: 0114 281 4585

Shelter Families Projects in Scotland:

Edinburgh: 0131 553 4999

Glasgow: 0141 433 4060

South Lanarkshire: 01698 307 112

Shelter Manchester Education Project: 0161 834 8456

Shelter Inclusion Project, Rochdale: 01706 523323

Bayswater Families Project, London: 020 7221 3290

Beaumont Leys Independent Support Service (BLISS), Leicester: 0116 252 2415

Finsbury Homeless Families Project, London: 020 8802 3257

Field Lane Homeless Families Centre, London: 020 7837 0412

EC Roberts Day Centre, Portsmouth: 023 9229 6919

New Leaf Supporting Independence Ltd., Places for People Group, Preston: 01772 897200

Shelter
88 Old Street
London EC1V 9HU

March 2003

£7.50 ISBN: 1 903595 15-0

Shelter produces a wide range of informative publications about housing and homelessness. For a catalogue please email keytitles@shelter.org.uk or visit our website at www.shelter.org.uk/publications

www.shelter.org.uk

Registered charity number 263710

Shelterline
0808 800 4444

Freephone. Translation service and textphone available

Shelternet
www.shelternet.org.uk

The home of housing advice

Shelter