

LACK:

Housing, Care & Isolation

includem 

June 2023

“[They have] no space to calm down when arguing with siblings.”

Experiences of stigma were raised frequently, including individually, in neighbourhoods and in dealing with the housing system. **Areas where families are housed** was a major focus for workers, as changes in location could dictate whether a family could access essentials, new opportunities and public spaces – or if they felt safe or isolated.

“[They are] often placed in street with similar families – [then these] streets that are seen as problematic.”

Working With Families

Includem workers discussed the impact housing challenges had on providing **wellbeing support**. They noted how housing conditions resulted in **tension** which could make it more difficult for families to reconcile or lead to separation. Housing challenges could lead to **feeling powerless and a lack of choice**, with a reluctance to ask for help due to shame, fear of judgment or being penalised. Housing could create wider **practical challenges** for supporting children or young people’s wellbeing – such as barriers to mental health services, seeking support and facilitating strategies or ideas for solutions.

“CAMHS will often refuse to offer support to young people 'in chaotic home environments' while the housing issues behind the 'chaos' are delayed for multiple months.”

When **identifying housing challenges**, most responses highlighted a strong confidence that the **relationships and trust built** with families, supported them to open up to workers. Several workers noted proactive ways this could be brought up in conversations or how to destigmatise asking for help.

“[We have] good relationships with families so they will reach out. [I’m] keeping up to date with local grants and funds even if doesn't apply, [it] helps to open up and make families feel comfortable reaching out for help.”

Being aware of signs from their **environment or behaviour** could also signify a need for help – including being withdrawn, struggling to get anything to dry due to dampness, poor health such as asthma, or consistent calls for support on other essentials.

“Families preventing professional access to their home due to struggling to manage to clean it. [They have] no money for heating, cleaning products and clothes washing.”

Once identified, workers report low **confidence** in supporting families with housing challenges, citing issues around a lack of accessible information, resources, knowledge or experience.

Taking Action on Housing

All respondents reported largely negative **experiences with housing support** in their area, identifying issues such as **a lack of information, accessibility and communication**, in addition to burdensome **paperwork**. Across sessions, workers expressed how families felt **unheard** by housing providers, leading to **their needs being unmet**. Workers recognised the significant challenges facing the housing system, such as **underfunding, a lack of staff and appropriate housing stock**.

*"We **had a number and housing provider** identified for a young person (over 16 in own tenancy), however the **one time we had to call to ask for support, the number was not in use**. I spent **2 hours online and calling several numbers** to find the **right one to ask** for support for a young person. **Not accessible/supportive at all.**"*

Includem workers identified several ways they **support and connect** children, young people and families facing housing challenges. When asked about preventative support, the majority of responses focused on **reducing costs and navigating income support** to support families to prioritise housing costs. There was a significant focus on food banks, the Citizens Advice Bureau, welfare rights, covering emergency costs for families and helping with budgeting.

“Welfare rights or citizens advice. The latter have a good tool on their website that you can use with families to help them see exactly where their money is going. Local authorities have teams with access to funds to help also.”

Wider **support in the community** identified accessing Shelter Scotland, community centres, other organisations and funds – including those in advocacy, money advice, and heating insecurity, welfare and furniture. Includem workers provided **practical advocacy and support**, including giving advice, helping with forms, providing supportive letters, and supporting contact with housing providers, social work, the council housing officers, and elected representatives. One response highlighted the value of using Children’s Rights language to keep other agencies conscious of their obligations.

“Referencing the UNCRC Article 27 when advocating for children, young people and families to access support for housing, food and clothing related issues can be helpful, and should be done anyway to keep other agencies conscious of their obligations.”

Recommendations

- Policies and practice intended to support families must recognise and respond to the impact that living in cold, unfurnished, unstable and/or mouldy housing may have on their wellbeing.
- To Keep the Promise and Scotland’s commitment to whole family support and tackling child poverty, the significant impact of housing challenges on a families’ homes and wellbeing must be recognised.
- Housing providers and housing officers need to work with children’s services to address root causes. Providing clear and accessible information, simplifying and standardising accessibility, and engaging in meetings focused on addressing the wellbeing and public health challenges families face holistically is crucial.
- Relationship-based approaches are needed to destigmatise asking for help and identifying those who need more support on their housing conditions. Their awareness of how different behaviours can be a symptom of root causes such as housing helps identify these challenges.
- There must be solutions to address housing shortages in Scotland, focused on providing affordable housing that meets the needs of a range of family sizes and young people in independent living.
- To support includem workers to connect and advocate for families facing housing challenges, includem should provide a concise resource that sets out the different support and funds they can access nationally and locally on housing and deprivation.
- This should come alongside training to enhance existing skills in practical advocacy for children, young people and families on housing issues, and using children’s rights language in practice with public agencies and elected representatives. Delivering this training with housing support organisations like Shelter or Crisis Scotland could strengthen relationships and knowledge for workers in key networks.
- Any resources and training developed with workers should focus on trauma informed and practical support, recognising the limitations of the housing system and helping connect them into external support locally and nationally. Building recognition of the critical nature of poverty-informed responses as a part of whole family support and their role should be further explored with staff.
- Managers should be supported to develop relationships with key housing staff and stakeholders, to support easier and better communication and resolution of challenges.

About the Report

Context

Includem community-based teams across Scotland have reported that families face major issues with their housing, impacting the wellbeing of children and young people, and the support they, and others across the family support sector, can deliver. This was reflected in earlier reports such as *It Is Not A Choice!* and the *Needs Now* Local Elections Manifesto, highlighting challenges such as overcrowding, temporary housing and black mould.

Some families have also shared individual accounts of their housing situations with us through their includem workers, including complex challenges overlapping with deprivation, care, mental health, neurodiversity, safety and isolation.

Lucas's story: Lucas was facing challenges with their behaviour, and social work refused to continue providing taxis to their school. With encouragement from their includem worker, Lucas wanted support for their mental health and expressed a real critical need for help. When doing their first assessment, CAMHS recognised they needed CBT. However, CAMHS refused to start Lucas's treatment plan until their home situation improved. At the time they were living in overcrowded housing, and their parent was continually told to wait for further housing support. Because Lucas had to share a room with their younger siblings, CAMHS made a child protection referral to Social Work due to the risk of violence, at the same time as refusing to begin treatment.

Harper's story: Harper and their two children were moved several times in under a year. This affected their routine, causing difficulties with the children's behaviour. This resulted in even further moves. The last move was from a hostel to a temporary homeless flat. This was against Harper's wishes, as they feared even more precarious temporary housing would cause their children to lose the routine they had in the hostel. Social Work and Housing told them that refusing would mean making themselves intentionally homeless.

James's story: After James' two children were placed in care and they separated from their partner, he was given a one-bedroom flat. Thankfully, the children have now been returned to their care, and they were able to reconcile with their partner. All 4 are now living in the flat with one bedroom and one public room. Overcrowding is causing stress, conflict, and mental health challenges - with one child asking to return to care. James and their family are still not being considered for rehousing, after repeated attempts to access support, with maximum points and having phone calls ignored.

Amelia's story: Ameila bought their flat in a council block, but is now facing challenges as their 10-year-old child was violent towards them and caused damage in the house. Amelia can't afford the repairs and can't meet the rising cost of living. They think they would be better off in council housing but can't sell their flat due to the unaffordable repairs and conveyancing costs, finding themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty.

Sarah's story: Sarah is a kinship carer for her grandchildren. The flat is overcrowded now that her grandchildren have come to stay. Sarah recently found out she has gone from 1st to 3rd on the housing list. She and her grandchildren have been waiting over a year now for a suitable home. When Sarah reached first place on the list, she began to source furniture for their future home. She is now living in an overcrowded flat full of things for the house. This latest disappointment as hit Sarah hard – she sleeps on the floor and has various health issues that are exacerbated by this. She tries very hard to remain positive, but she was very tearful and upset after this recent news. The family need space and security desperately. Sarah wants to settle her grandchildren but can't.

Methodology

To understand the complexity of the situations workers face with families and how this relates to the support they deliver, we designed a series of sessions to hear from them. Between the 20th of February to the 12th of March 2023, we gathered views from our teams in Aberdeen, Dundee, Fife, Forth Valley and Glasgow. We asked questions across 3 themes. Some responses were from teams, some from individuals and all responses were anonymous.

We asked them about...

- **What we see and hear:** experiences in the communities we support in relation to housing.
- **Working with families:** how they identify and support families with housing challenges.
- **Taking action on housing:** The public and community support available to families.

All italics are quotes from includem workers.

Workers report that families experience states of disrepair, both their homes and the wider environment. This includes unmaintained closes and water damage spreading from other flats.

“Private landlords - not able to get in touch with and repairs not being done.”

Tenancy, instability, and temporary housing - Temporary, Landlords

These conditions are tied to neglect by housing providers across private landlords, councils and housing associations. Temporary accommodation in particular can leave families in indefinite instability.

“Council not helping with repairs.”

“Temporary accommodation - not knowing when they will get a permanent home.”

One worker noted how assumptions of wealth based on private ownership could also form a barrier for support.

“[There is a] lack of financial support if houses are privately owned.”

Making a home - Dirty, Unfurnished, Cold

Workers highlight how difficult it can be for parents, carers or young people to make their housing a home. This includes challenges such as moving into an unfurnished or damaged flat and being unable to afford furniture, new carpets, cleaning supplies or heating.

“[They are] in a brand-new house. There is nothing in it.”

For elderly carers or for those moving in for the first time, they may lack the needed support to decorate.

“[The] ability to do DIY [do it yourself.] [There are] many elderly people supporting young people and are not physically able to decorate.”

Community-based workers’ experiences make clear that in order to work, policies and practice intended to support families must recognise and respond to the impact that living in cold, unfurnished, unstable and/or mouldy housing may have on their wellbeing.

The Impact on Wellbeing

Includem workers report that these housing conditions impact individual wellbeing and families as a whole and can result in deepening poverty, affecting entire communities.

As individuals – *Negative, Struggle, Choice, Challenging, Stressful, Frustrating, Overwhelmed, Pressure, Emotional, Health, Difficult, Shame, Depression, Hopeless, Depression, Confidence, Anxiety, Mental, Happy*

Workers identified several ways housing conditions impacted individual wellbeing for the children and adults they support. Responses were dominated by negative impacts on mental and emotional health, which workers felt contributed to depression and anxiety, as well as a feeling of hopelessness and shame.

“[The] lack of stability stops young people feeling at home and settled.”

“[It] causes stress, anxiety, poor mental health...”

On top of this mental pressure, housing conditions could effect their physical health, impacting their life outside of their home or resulting in worsening health conditions like asthma, especially for young children.

“[They] have to go to school tired, cold, hungry...”

“Health issues, such as asthma being exacerbated etc by [their] home/living conditions.”

As a family – *Conflict, Tension, Connection, Arguing, Behaviour*

With this strain on individuals, growing tension results in families being unable to build a connection and can result in relationship breakdown. Conflict in families was consistently tied to the lack of space caused by overcrowding.

“Depression, hopeless, [it can make them want to] give up. [A] lack of useable family spaces.”

“[There is] no space for children to have their own space, [it] causes conflict.”

Deepening poverty and destitution – *Food, Cost of living, Finances, Skint, Deprivation, Tired, Cold Hungry*

Workers consistently referenced families also lacking other essentials. This reflects findings from the *It Is Not A Choice!* Report, where families who reported struggling with their rent or mortgage also struggled across all other essentials – including food, heating and goods such as hygiene products.

“Families having to ask for basics.”

For young people and families that already lack family support, financial resources or external support, delays in social security can escalate crisis and debt.

*“Delays of [5] weeks in accessing **Universal Credit** after a successful application leave young people and families **with no income, no money for heating, food or any other costs.**”*

Stigma, points and waiting lists - *Stigma, Points, Unfair, Waiting lists, Applications, Support*

Experiences of stigma were raised frequently, including around criminal records, if there is rubbish in their garden, or due to the previous tenants.

“...when a young person moves they are already being judged due to [the] previous tenants.”

Several workers discussed waiting lists, leaving some families waiting for several years for a change.

“[They’ve] been on the list for 7 or 8 years for a bigger house.”

One team directly referenced the housing points system as stigmatising and unfair, working against the social inclusion of families. Reflecting a similar account from a parent in the Local Elections Manifesto, the team highlighted that it was not only stigmatising, but a high number of housing points intended to indicate urgent need wasn’t reflected in the urgency given.

“Even when high on housing list – [they are] still in for a long wait.”

Community, safety and inclusion – *Vandalism, Crime, Area, Location, Schools, Accessibility, Neighbours, Disruptive, Safety, Unsafe, Bullying, Isolated, inclusion, Targeted*

Workers consistently discussed the challenges that derive from the areas of housing and safety. They reported that families were more likely to be in unsafe locations or live in areas with concentrations of deprivation – resulting in experiences of stigma as a collective / neighbourhood.

“[They are] often placed in street with similar families – [then these] streets that are seen as problematic.”

The areas families live in can include a lack of opportunities or access to necessities like supermarkets or transport, without spaces for children and young people to play or connect. This is exacerbated by families being pushed out of areas, losing their network of support, feelings of isolation, children having to move schools and/or experience bullying, and issues with ‘anti-social behaviour’ from neighbours.

“[There is a] lack of outdoor space. Not having anywhere for children and young people to go.”

Three responses reported that communities around them are aware and able to identify families in vulnerable situations, which can result in being targeted.

“[They are] targeted – houses being egged.”

Concerningly, these reports of challenges in their community and a lack of outdoor or public spaces come alongside reports that families are having to spend a lot of time out with the house due overcrowding, a lack of furniture or safety.

“They don’t have safety in their own home so seek this out externally.”

The impact of housing conditions and areas on family wellbeing are striking – creating challenges for children, young people and families with mental health and wellbeing, family relationships, deepening deprivation, and community connections. It has a significant relationship to experiences of stigma - cutting across individual, neighbourhood, community and systematic issues. Most concerningly, all responding teams identified these housing challenges as widespread – tying these to a lack of resources, suitable housing or amenities and access to services.

“... They are localised and widespread. Not just citywide, but nationally.”

These conditions can lead to families having to separate for space, or young people moving out before they are ready. Notably, overcrowding is particularly challenging for families during transitions in children and young people’s care.

“Splitting up [their] own family for space.”

“Overcrowding most common, especially if children have moved in to live with parents or kinship carers.”

Lack of choice and feeling powerless

Workers reported how the impact of housing on families could prevent them from building a better life. This included the feeling of powerlessness and lack of choice, impacting motivation. Growing health issues from dampness and poor conditions, alongside the mental health strain can provide extremely challenging conditions for seeking improvements.

“Some have lack of motivation, wanting to leave the house etc if there is no heating/hot water, health issues will build and mental health will worsen due to the stress of living in the house with all of the issues they are struggling with.”

Personal experiences of shame, embarrassment or distrust can result in families being reluctant to share the extent of their housing challenges. Families may prevent access to their home, driven by fear that their housing conditions will lead to their children being taken into care due to child protection concerns.

“Families can be reluctant to let services know that they are struggling, especially when there are child protection concerns for the welfare of the child.”

One team highlighted the impossibility of the situation some families are under – being expected to make changes while still living in the conditions that caused their distress.

“Child protection - how much can families change or impact when it is overcrowded and [that] causes or triggers behaviour.”

Practical challenges

Trying to deliver or sign post to support can be challenging, as housing difficulties or destitution create barriers for children, young people and families. For example, being unable to afford internet or phone credit can prevent contacting or communicating with children and young people.

“Young people will sometimes not reply to text messages due to no credit on phones.”

Most notably, public services, such as CAHMS, that are intended to support children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing, are not designed to help families facing these challenges.

“If housing situation is unsettled CAHMS won’t work with them.”

This can result in children and young people experiencing lengthy waiting lists for support, only to be told that their credible need for mental health support will not be addressed until their housing conditions improve – which could take months, sometimes years.

“CAMHS will often refuse to offer support to young people 'in chaotic home environments' while the housing issues behind the 'chaos' are delayed for multiple months.”

The home environment can limit what support workers can provide for young people. Strategies of support cannot be facilitated, and creative ideas that could be helpful, like providing a punching bag or trampoline, cannot be explored due to the lack of space.

“Opportunities of doing learning with them in the home [is limited] due to not having a space to do this or materials needed. Strategies of support can't be tried or facilitated due to the house environment or conditions.”

The impact of housing on support makes a strong case that action should be taken organisationally to support workers with relevant resources and training - in a way that works for them and the families they support.

Identifying housing challenges

Building trust and opening up

Most responses highlighted a strong confidence that families would tell them when they are facing challenges with their housing due to the trust and relationships they have built. Some felt this was more related to parents, while others included children and young people.

“When relationships are built families will tell workers in confidence [the] challenges they are facing.”

“Our relationships make discussing housing issues fairly straightforward, but children rarely discuss housing, it is more likely to be parents/carers.”

“A young person recently drew a picture of a house, this prompted convo around housing.”

“We've already build a good relationship with the families and feel confident around bringing this up.”

A number of responses identified ways they could proactively bring this into conversations around support to help families feel more comfortable to come forward. While one worker felt that it didn't come up naturally, several responses mentioned that the topic came up naturally in conversations about the cost-of-living crisis, in preparation for winter or through effective questioning.

“[I] mention during introductions all the different things we can help out with.”

“During the winter months this would come through conversation naturally when discussing preparation for winter ensuring families had access to duvets, curtains. Cost of living crisis brought up more conversations around housing.”

Two responses illustrated a strong commitment to destigmatising families' experiences of asking for help by keeping up to date with potential areas support or being transparent about housing issues.

"[We have] good relationships with families so they will reach out. [I'm] keeping up to date with local grants and funds even if doesn't apply, [it] helps to open up and make families feel comfortable reaching out for help."

"Being transparent about issues with housing and having built a relationship this can help allow the conversation to flow and parents and young people feel more comfortable expressing their difficulties."

Often this conversation will happen over the course of their relationship, as workers build trust with children, young people and families and understand their circumstances.

"Changes within the household that are noticeable, parents may open up about their struggles or young people may open up about their parents struggles."

Environment and behaviour

Several workers highlighted signs that families may need housing support, such as poor conditions (like dampness and overcrowding), eviction letters, wider financial issues or consistent calls for support with other essentials. Two responses highlighted how a family behaving embarrassed or fearful of letting others enter their home was a sign that they needed support.

"Families preventing professional access to their home due to struggling to manage to clean it. [They have] no money for heating, cleaning products and clothes washing."

Teams discussed different behaviours that can suggest that a family may need more support on their housing. These ranged from family members being withdrawn or avoidant, young people's behaviour, experiences of stigma or poor health such as asthma, or issues around clothing, such as being unable to get anything dry due to dampness or not having school clothes ready.

"Overcrowding causes conflict within the home, can see this in young people we support."

Positive signs included families having pride in their property, decorating, or having less contact with the council for housing updates.

Includem workers responses illustrate the value of relationship-based approaches to destigmatise asking for help and identifying those who need more support on their housing conditions. Their awareness of how different behaviours can be a symptom of root causes such as housing helps identify these challenges.

Confidence

Once identified, workers report low confidence in supporting families with housing challenges, citing issues around a lack of accessible information, resources, knowledge or experience. The housing system itself was also seen as a major barrier due to not being trauma informed.

“[It’s about] knowing where to go with the information.”

Low confidence was not tied to years of experience and includes workers who have recently joined includem and those who have been in the role for multiple years. Five responses mentioned feeling comfortable signposting families to external housing support or asking for advice from others when needed.

“Isn't something I deal with regularly so would need to seek out help from team and managers.”

The worker with the highest confidence rating cited that they did not see this as a part of their role, relying on signposting.

“10- Because I know who to signpost the family to as this isn't my role.”

Inaccessibility and a lack of communication

The inaccessibility of housing support was seen as a major barrier and stressor for families, marked by significant phone call times, waiting and bureaucracy.

"[It's] not easy to find the right person to talk to, information [is] not readily available. [There are] a lot of barriers for people e.g. lots of forms, having to visit offices, judgement..."

When asked about public housing support, nine out of eleven responses directly referenced a lack of information or communication. Information on public housing support was seen as difficult to track down, inadequate and sometimes conflicting.

"[There is a] significant lack of information regarding housing in my area and [it's] very difficult to try to access this information."

"[there is a need for] more information on housing criteria and processes as [there is] conflicting information in areas."

Three teams discussed how it was difficult to find, contact or maintain communication with the relevant housing officer. One worker described a time when a housing provider and a support contact had been identified, only to find their contact number was not in use when needed.

*"We **had a number and housing provider** identified for a young person (over 16 in own tenancy), however the **one time we had to call to ask for support, the number was not in use**. I spent **2 hours online and calling several numbers** to find the **right one to ask** for support for a young person. **Not accessible/supportive at all.**"*

Workers report that this lack of communication and follow through can build distrust in public services and feeds into perceptions that seeking support is futile.

"Communication and lack of follow through can leave young people feeling like 'what's the point?'."

This reflects reports of families experiencing powerlessness when facing housing challenges (See: Impact on Wellbeing Support).

Paperwork

Paperwork requirements and applications for support were seen as overly burdensome on families already facing challenging circumstances.

“[The] application process for carpets & decorating can be difficult.”

One response highlighted how cutting down on paperwork, standardising forms and making them accessible online could help.

“All housing associations should have one standard form which can be accessed online. This would save workers and families a lot of time.”

Unheard and unseen

Across sessions, workers have expressed how families can be unheard or ignored by public housing support, while facing increasingly dire circumstances. Five responses across sessions noted specifically how Housing didn't always turn up to meetings that were crucial to planning support for families.

“[They are] poor and slow to respond. Housing often do not turn up for meetings.”

“Housing used to come to LIACE TAC reviews – they are not always there.”

Disregarding needs

Several responses mentioned that this lack of communication or follow through led to Housing not considering the needs of families effectively, sometimes leading to people facing crisis instead of receiving the support necessary to achieve stability in their home life.

"Housing deciding what the family need and not considering needs. Case being closed on homeless housing after 1 year of waiting and no further forward."

*"...Housing won't take into account the family's **circumstances and needs and make the decision for them, supportive letters will not influence their decision.**"*

One team noted that these issues around accessibility of support or ownership over the impact of housing challenges leads to a *"lack of multidisciplinary approaches & communication"* that could help better address wellbeing challenges and issues from siloed working.

Resourcing and housing supply

It is important to note that workers consistently mentioned larger challenges facing the housing system, such as the lack of staff in public housing support and significant underfunding.

*"Housing are very **underfunded**; they **rarely call back and waiting times** are very long."*

While the system itself was not seen as trauma informed, one worker noted that this wasn't due to individual housing officers.

"Individual housing officers can/are trauma informed."

Across teams, people discussed the lack of appropriately sized housing for different types of families or young people in independent living. One worker noted that the lack of single bed flats can increase costs.

“[There are] multi-generational families living in [one] house.”

“Lack of appropriate housing for teenagers.”

This was seen as a major challenge for larger families, with the lack of 4 or 5 bedrooms in affordable housing resulting in high levels of overcrowding for families. This compounds as children grow and need more personal space.

“Sharing rooms – [there is] no forward planning for when children grow up.”

To Keep the Promise and Scotland’s commitment to whole family support and tackling child poverty, the significant impact of housing challenges on a families’ homes and wellbeing must be recognised. Housing providers and housing officers need to work with children’s services to address root causes. Providing clear and accessible information, simplifying and standardising accessibility, and engaging in meetings focused on a holistic response to the wellbeing and public health challenges families face is crucial.

“Housing being at meetings would help provide knowledge & information. [It] would provide proactive updates.”

This must happen alongside solutions to address housing shortages in Scotland, focused on providing affordable housing that meets the needs of a range of family sizes and young people in independent living.

Supporting and connecting

Reducing costs and navigating income support

When asked about preventative support for families facing housing challenges, workers referenced families struggling with essentials and food banks in more than half of responses. This included practical responses like helping families access them or picking up food parcels where needed. Some workers pointed to pantries such as Inverclyde Community Trust or more flexible food banks as helpful.

“...Foodbanks can assist but many are quite restrictive with opening hours and referral systems. I have driven across the city before to access a great foodbank which is open every weekday without referrals and assist with other household items.”

“Foodbanks - can be difficult to make full meals.”

This appears to support the findings from the *It Is Not a Choice!* Report, which suggested that families are prioritising their housing costs over other essentials.

Several workers discussed contacting Citizens Advice Bureau for support with deposits and appeals, Welfare Rights to ensure they are accessing all their entitlements, and contacting the local authority for additional support. They have also used tools and resources to help families with budgeting or maximise incomes.

“Welfare rights or citizens advice. The latter have a good tool on their website that you can use with families to help them see exactly where their money is going. Local authorities have teams with access to funds to help also.”

One worker pointed to the support they deliver directly to cover emergency costs for families, such as using the includem Young Person’s Fund to address areas of need or topping up their fuel.

Three workers noted that some young people and parents lacked opportunities to learn how to manage a household, budgeting and independent living. One response focused on the benefits that strength-based approaches to develop these skills could bring.

"I see a lot of young parents that have grown up never fully understanding how to budget, pay bills, prioritise within their household. Budgeting support and new learning opportunities could really enhance their understanding. How can we expect them to know how not to get into debt when they were never taught/had someone to role model?"

Support in the community

When asked about the organisations and groups they have worked with to help families facing housing challenges, over two thirds of responses mentioned Shelter Scotland directly. Responses included references to their helpline, helpful lists of advice and support with housing forms.

"Shelter, can be long on helpline but once you contact them then [they] give great support."

"Shelter are amazing! Have supported in the past to ensure all relevant forms have been completed to ensure maximum points given."

Workers mentioned connecting and communicating on behalf of families with community centres or services like Recycle Room, other support organisations & charities like Home Start, advocacy organisations such as You First Advocacy in Renfrew, the debt recovery centre, money advice centres like Money Matters, and using Home Energy Scotland to identify heating support funds. All teams mentioned supporting families to apply for a variety of funds, such as the Welfare fund, the Drapers fund and furniture grants.

Practical advocacy and support

Across responses, workers discuss how they advise and support young people to contact or meet with their social worker for guidance and assistance; or contact the housing provider, the council, social workers or the housing office on a family's behalf.

"Working with social work - they have a private lets team available to assist with landlords."

Two workers mentioned helping those they support contact their local MP or MSP. Another highlighted the value of using children's rights language in advocating for children, young people and families.

"Referencing the UNCRC Article 27 when advocating for children, young people and families to access support for housing, food and clothing related issues can be helpful, and should be done anyway to keep other agencies conscious of their obligations."

Several had helped young people and families fill out housing applications, provide supportive letters to housing and look at different housing providers and associations in the local community.

*"Ensure the family have completed all relevant housing applications but there are so many that this **takes up a lot of time** - particularly when you are supporting a family who speak **English as a second language** and don't have **literacy skills**."*

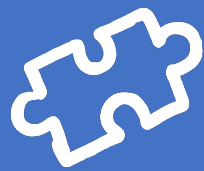
To support includem workers to connect and advocate for families facing housing challenges, includem should provide a concise resource that sets out the different support and funds they can access nationally and locally on housing and deprivation. This should come alongside training to enhance existing skills in practical advocacy for children, young people and families on housing issues, and using children's rights language in practice with public agencies and elected representatives. Delivering this training with housing support organisations like Shelter or Crisis Scotland could strengthen relationships and knowledge for workers in key networks.

As illustrated by the scale of responses related to the need for families to depend on food banks or struggling with other essentials, government ambitions of End The Need For Food Banks cannot be reached without addressing wider structural and financial challenges.

Recommendations

The findings of this report demonstrate that to realise the Scottish Governments commitments to #KeepingThePromise and ending child poverty by 2030, families need to be supported to overcome their housing challenges. Workers providing family support need to be supported and equipped to meet the diverse challenges experienced by families trying to make their housing a home. Structural changes are needed to realise these aspirations.

- Policies and practice intended to support families must recognise and respond to the impact that living in cold, unfurnished, unstable and/or mouldy housing may have on their wellbeing.
- To Keep the Promise and Scotland's commitment to whole family support and tackling child poverty, the significant impact of housing challenges on a families' homes and wellbeing must be recognised.
- Housing providers and housing officers need to work with children's services to address root causes. Providing clear and accessible information, simplifying and standardising accessibility, and engaging in meetings focused on addressing the wellbeing and public health challenges families face holistically is crucial.
- Relationship-based approaches are needed to destigmatise asking for help and identifying those who need more support on their housing conditions. Their awareness of how different behaviours can be a symptom of root causes such as housing helps identify these challenges.
- There must be solutions to address housing shortages in Scotland, focused on providing affordable housing that meets the needs of a range of family sizes and young people in independent living.
- To support includem workers to connect and advocate for families facing housing challenges, includem should provide a concise resource that sets out the different support and funds they can access nationally and locally on housing and deprivation.
- This should come alongside training to enhance existing skills in practical advocacy for children, young people and families on housing issues, and using children's rights language in practice with public agencies and elected representatives. Delivering this training with housing support organisations like Shelter or Crisis Scotland could strengthen relationships and knowledge for workers in key networks.
- Any resources and training developed with workers should focus on trauma informed and practical support, recognising the limitations of the housing system and helping connect them into external support locally and nationally. Building recognition of the critical nature of poverty-informed responses as a part of whole family support and their role should be further explored with staff.
- Managers should be supported to develop relationships with key housing staff and stakeholders, to support easier and better communication and resolution of challenges.



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