

**“No Home does not mean no Hope? Early interventions
with homeless families in temporary accommodation”**

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“Homelessness is always the culmination of a sequence of devastating events and experiences. It creates further risks for already vulnerable adults; and their children”

A joint Health and Sure Start/Flying Start education & psychology service for families of preschool children who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation in Cardiff. This initiative grew from an identification of gaps in provision locally and an assessment of priority aspects where intervention could be most effective. The provision was designed to be flexible yet consistent; open and easily accessible yet structured. Successful strategies evolved as the project became responsive to the practicalities and needs encountered within the hostels. Research has indicated serious heightened risks for each family member following homelessness.

“For children in particular, the detrimental effects of homelessness and poor housing are long-term; causing and exacerbating mental and physical health problems, disrupting education and leading to stress within households. Since a child’s early experiences contribute significantly to determining emotional wellbeing and their later achievements, these effects can be long lasting.” Pritchard (2006)

A homeless family living within temporary accommodation with preschool child(ren) can now receive:-

- Specialist Health Visitor input
- Weekly play session (one day per hostel)
- Individualised programmes for managing behaviour and for building better parent & child interactions
- Individualised input on health-related issues
- Series of targeted parenting sessions (based on Parent Nurturing Programme)
- Regular consultation with parents & staff to ensure their engagement
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There are considerable advantages to the multi-agency and Specialist Team approach. It helps break down barriers and challenges negative attitudes formed by parents towards organisations and professionals. There can be a speedy analysis and response to complex needs. Professionals from differing backgrounds are able to see the value of offering families consistent messages; and working together to ensure that the most appropriate support is identified and offered. The parents do not care which agency or profession has helped – simply that they received the right input at the right time.

Children have gained important play opportunities and have had engagement with their parents encouraged. Families have benefited from targeted early interventions. These have improved parent-child interactions, encouraged greater parental confidence and competence in playing with the child and in managing their child’s behaviour. Several areas of concern had become less entrenched. Consequently additional, and probably more intrusive and expensive, services may not have to intervene at a later date.