

# Keys to the Future

An independent evaluation of Shelter's  
Children's Services

Knowsley service interim report



Shelter



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**Acknowledgements**

The evaluation team would like to thank everyone who gave their time to participate in this evaluation and made invaluable contributions: the case study family, the staff team at the Knowsley service and the Project Steering Group.

Cover photograph by Sophie Laslett. Other photographs by Nick David, Sophie Laslett and Andrea Testoni.

To protect the identity of Shelter clients, names have been changed and models have been used in photographs.

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## Introduction

This report has been produced as part of an independent evaluation of the Keys to the Future (KTTF) programme commissioned by Shelter, specifically covering the Child Support Service in Knowsley. It presents the findings of qualitative research conducted with staff, stakeholders, and the case study family. It aims to provide an overview of the achievements of the service to date and, as such, contributes to an evaluation summary report that covers all of the Keys to the Future interventions.



# Aims and interventions

## Aims

The Knowsley Child Support Service works with children in families that are perceived as being 'intentionally homeless', or who are at risk of eviction because of antisocial behaviour (ASB) within or outside the family.

Many of the families supported by the service may have moved (eg due to rent arrears, neighbour complaints or domestic violence) from secure, rented accommodation with one of the local registered social landlords (Knowsley has no council housing stock, having transferred housing stock to Knowsley Housing Trust) into often less secure accommodation in the private rented sector.

## Interventions

In order to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness, the team at the Keys to the Future service uses a range of interventions, including:

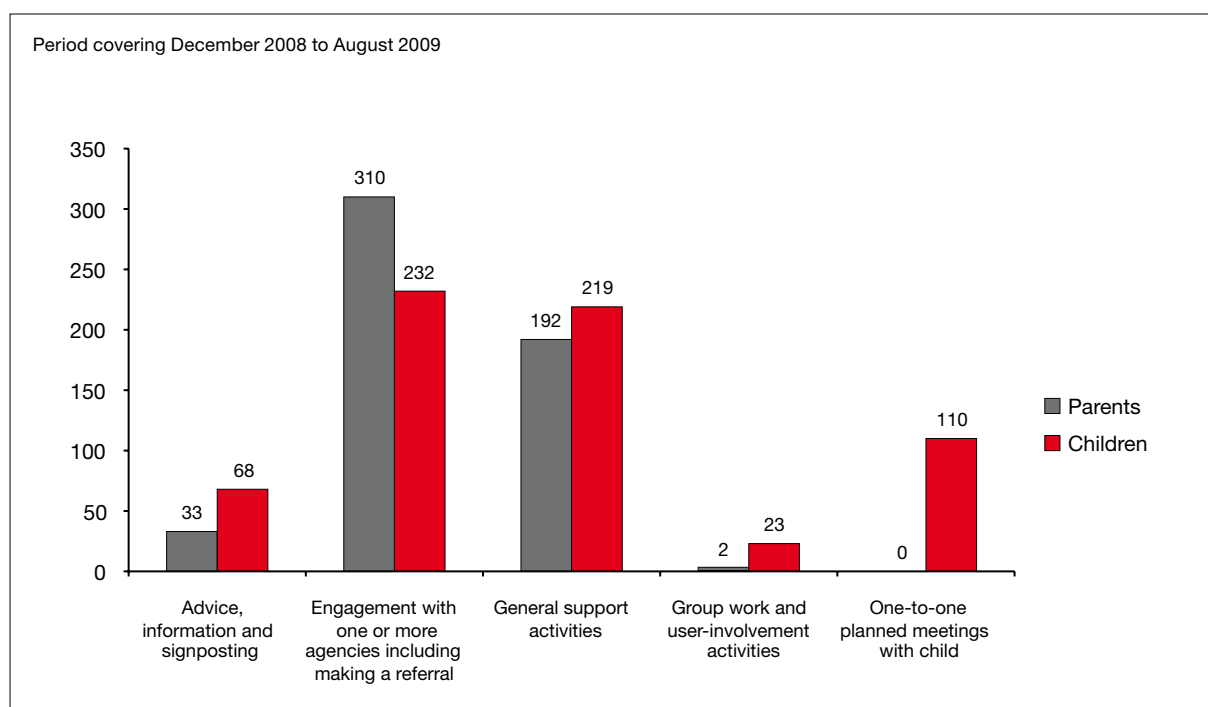
- one-to-one work with children
- work with siblings
- family support (which can include encouraging families to take part in fun activities together, such as games of twister and bowling, or encouraging healthy eating by taking ingredients into the home and working with the family to prepare a healthy meal)
- small group work, bringing together two or three children to undertake activities together

- multi-agency working to ensure that children and families have access to the right services to support them
- advice and signposting to other agencies.

The service takes a positive approach to working with children and their families using a risk assessment, not sanctioned-based, approach to decision making. This approach enables the team to avoid withdrawing support in response to poor behaviour and ensures that a range of factors are taken into consideration when planning activities.

Graph 1 shows frequency of interventions used by the service to date. Forty-six per cent (542) of all interventions involved making a referral or engaging with other agencies. Thirty-five per cent (411) were handled through general support activities. These interventions represent the most commonly used ones by the team to date.

**Graph 1: Types of interventions**



## Delivery against targets

The Knowsley Keys to the Future service commenced in December 2008, moved into premises in Knowsley in February 2009 and, as such, only really started delivery in March 2009.

**Table 1**

Target	Count
600 children receive a housing needs assessment	94
480 children receive multi-agency support	23
120 children receive intensive tailored support	13



## Programme reach

The information in this section is based on monitoring data for 23 children supported by the service during the period December 2008 to August 2009.

### Ethnicity

As can be seen from Table 2, the majority of children supported by the service were white. This is not surprising since, according to the Office of National Statistics, the 2001 Census showed that 98.4 per cent of the area's population classified themselves as white.

**Table 2: Ethnicity of children supported in Knowsley**

Ethnicity	Count
Mixed white and Asian	1
White British	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>

## Gender

Table 3 shows that, to date, the service has worked with more boys than girls. This may reflect that communities perceive boys to be more troublesome than girls. However, given that the service has only been fully operational for six months, it may simply reflect the referral patterns to date.

**Table 3: Gender of children supported in Knowsley**

Gender	Count
Female	8
Male	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>

## Disability

While the majority of the children have not had a disability, the service has supported one child with autism and two children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to date. See Table 4.

**Table 4: Number of children with disabilities supported in Knowsley**

Disability	Count
ADHD	2
Autism	1
No disability	19
Unknown	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>

## Age

The majority of children supported to date are in the 6- to 12-year-old age range. This could be an early indicator that these are children not served by either Children's Centres or the Connexions service.

**Table 5: Age of children supported by Knowsley**

Age	Count
0-4	4
6-12	14
13-16	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>



## Impact and outcomes

There is clear evidence that strong case planning is in place. And in the case study family, for example, ‘exit planning is already under consideration’, with workers thinking about onward referrals and ensuring that the family does not become dependent on the support. The service’s team is looking at good practice across Shelter and currently thinking about developing a post-service group similar to Bristol’s Groovy Team.

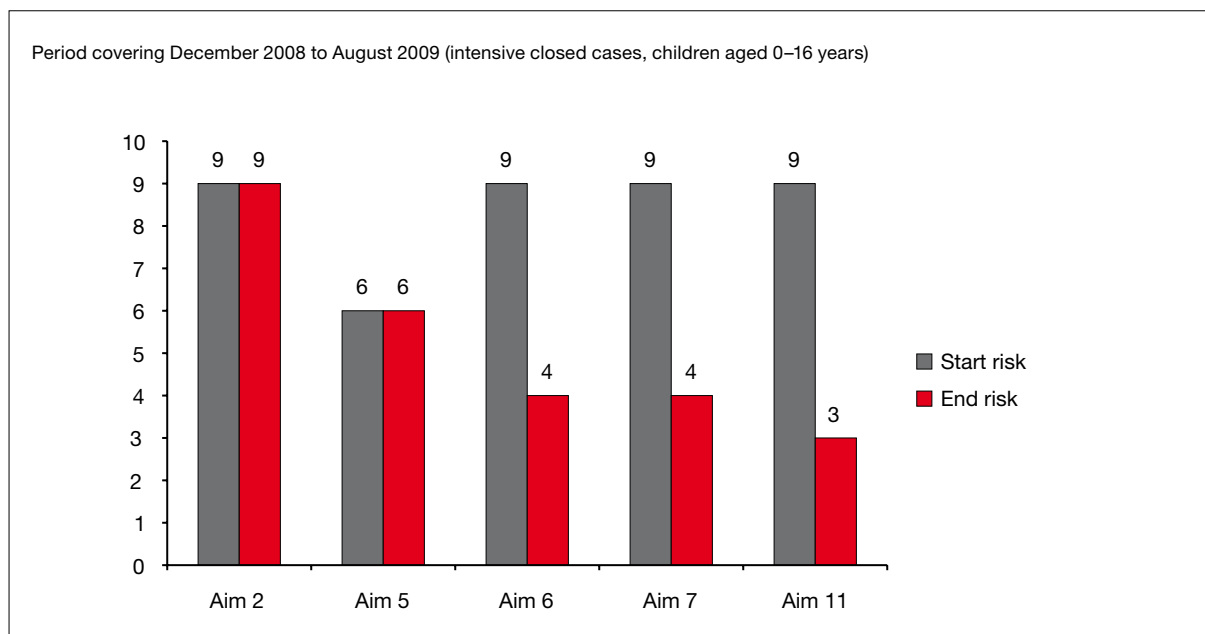
Within the case study family, emphasis was placed on encouraging the whole family to communicate with each other through the introduction of family and siblings’ activities, which have helped the family to redefine and reframe their relationships with one another. Mum is more aware of the need to put in place and enforce appropriate boundaries around behaviour, and is being encouraged by the Child Support Worker (CSW) to make it clear that ‘you don’t get something for nothing, and to reward good behaviour’. This is then reinforced through Keys to the Future’s involvement where, for example, the CSW has set and maintained boundaries in relation to swearing, and has worked with the child to highlight that he can make good choices and to increase his awareness of how making positive choices will affect his future. The case study child is more aware of the consequences of his actions and shows an understanding of the need to break out of the cycle of antisocial behaviour in order to achieve his goals of going to college and getting a good job.

The service is delivering against the Every Child Matters (ECM) framework and the Keys to the Future interventions have clearly reduced potential risk factors for the children with which they work.

Graph 2 identifies that the service is being very successful in reducing or stabilising the following risks:

- behaviour (by encouraging positive behaviour, and by helping children to understand the consequences of their behaviour, including encouraging law abiding behaviour)
- school attendance
- bullying.

**Graph 2: Average movement in risk for closed cases**



It is worth noting that the service did not have any cases where the risk factor increased after initial assessment.

Table 6 shows how the service is performing against Every Child Matters outcomes to date.

**Table 6: Count of ECM outcomes for closed cases**

ECM aim	Count
Aim 2 – Children and young people are mentally and emotionally healthy	1
Aim 5 – Children and young people are safe from discrimination and bullying, and are safe from crime and antisocial behaviour in and out of school	1
Aim 6 – Children and young people have security, stability and are cared for	1
Aim 7 – Children and young people attend and enjoy school	2
Aim 11 – Children and young people engage in law-abiding and positive behaviour, in and out of school, and develop positive relationships and choose not to bully or discriminate	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>



## Stakeholder perspectives

The service has benefitted from a well-networked, committed advisory group that worked with Shelter to design the service and to embed the ethos of partnership working at a very early stage. The effectiveness of the group attracted the attention of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Communities and Local Government (CLG) as an example of good practice in integrating housing and children's issues (even before the service had started its delivery). Currently, the steering group is redefining its role and moving from design and development to having a more operational focus, which offers the service a real opportunity to strengthen partnership working arrangements.

This early commitment, coupled with the appointment of two key staff (who brought with them networks and contacts in local agencies), has seen the service become well established in a very short space of time.

## Developing referral routes

For example, at a meeting of the steering group in June 2009, the service reported it was working with 19 children (15 of these from single parent households). Referral routes for those 19 children and families included:

- one referral from Shelter's Family Intervention Project (FIP), of which there are three operating in Knowsley
- four from Knowsley Housing Trust, which is the service's largest source of referrals
- one from Kirby Children's Centre
- one from the Kirby Family Centre
- two from Prescot Citizens Advice Bureau
- three from the Tenant Extra Support Service (TESS)
- one from a primary school.

Families can refer themselves, and other referring agencies include social services, the area's Housing Action Team, and other schools and children's or family centres. The service also feels that it has successful and productive onward referral routes. By September 2009 the team were working at full capacity, and they are looking to identify other services to offer support. Both outward referrals to other services as part of a planned exit strategy, and referrals to other agencies where Shelter is hoping to work collaboratively to offer a comprehensive support package, are determined by the response time of other agencies as one interviewee commented: 'Multi-agency working is dependent on other agencies and we can wait for nine weeks, for example, for a social work assessment.'

## Communication

The team works to keep the referring organisation up to date and see this communication as important because 'it builds trust between the organisations. Even where we can't help immediately we still keep in touch with the referring agency. We're getting a lot of positive feedback from referring agencies – who are mentioning Shelters involvement, and because of the feedback... they find Shelter an easy partner which again creates more referrals into the Project'.

## Complexity of cases

The team is working with children and families with high-level complex needs, often with long-established issues or problems underpinning their behaviours, such as substance misuse or mental health problems that are contributing to the families' homelessness risk – in that drug or alcohol dependency may adversely affect children's behaviour, and may be causing rent arrears that could then be perceived as the family making itself intentionally homeless.

Given the complexity of the need, it is 'not easy to work with just one child in the household (which is often the case where one child is responsible for the ASB). We're looking at doing more family activities'. Another interviewee commented on the level of need: '...nearly all of whom have complex needs, certainly more complex than originally thought.'

Because cases are more complex than originally anticipated, and because of the timescales and capacity of outward referral agencies, the team is becoming very creative in how and where it makes onward referrals. A Keys to the Future worker said: 'The project has become established quickly, and we're getting lots of referrals in, we may reach a bottleneck if we can't close them quickly enough.' They are also working with other agencies to develop smoother referral processes.

## Common Assessment Framework

The service identified that the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) was not being well implemented in the borough and that CAF take up is low, even though 'Sometimes we attend multi-agency meetings where there are seven agencies involved, including social services, and there will not be a CAF in place'. The team has been proactive in approaching the CAF manager and building a useful relationship that may result in more families benefitting from the CAF approach. The team has good relationships with a number of local schools using CAFs and 'good experiences of joint working with schools, where they will pick up issues with the parents and then refer these onto Shelter', although more difficult to build a strategic relationship with the education department.



## Lessons learnt

The service has become well established in a short space of time, and has identified that clear, regular communication builds trust among operational partners and fosters positive multi-agency working. Regular information-sharing with external agencies raises Shelters profile, which in turn increases referrals to the service.

The Keys to the Future service has identified a gap in services for 6- to 12-year-olds. The borough offers support to younger children through Children's Centres and older children go to Connexions, but the general view is that there is a shortage of services for this 'in between' age group – a view supported by data that shows the majority of the children supported by the Keys to the Future service are aged between six and 12.



## Case study

### Family profile

Harry (12), his Mum Sue, and older brother John have a history of moving into a property and accruing rent arrears and other debts then moving on again, and repeating the cycle. Mum has mild to moderate learning disabilities, which has contributed to the family's somewhat chaotic lifestyle. Harry is bright and articulate and has, for example, recently been assessed as having a reading age of 19.

### Referral route

The family were working with the Tenant Extra Support Service (TESS), and involved with the Family Intervention Project (FIP). They were able to choose to work with the FIP or with the Knowsley Keys to the Future service and chose to work with Shelter. Work started in March 2009.

### Needs identification

Following an initial visit to the family with the TESS worker the Child Support Worker (CSW), the key areas identified for support were:

- helping the family make a fresh start by working with other agencies to get them into a new house in a different area
- establishing Harry in a school where he is able to achieve his potential
- improving the relationship with his older brother
- supporting Mum to maintain discipline in the home.

There were inappropriate role boundaries between Harry and his Mum, with '[the child] being 'very' the man of the house, and very cheeky with Mum'.

However, the key issue was with school. Harry was not attending regularly. When he was there he tended to be very verbally aggressive and found it difficult to stay in class to the extent that 'he often ran around the school being chased by staff'. There was a history of school suspensions and he was in danger of being permanently excluded.

Both children have a history of antisocial behaviour, and were so often in conflict with neighbours that they were often blamed for things that happened when they were not even there. Both boys are fiercely protective of Mum, which in the past has led them to engage in threatening and violent behaviour.

## Keys to the Future's interventions

Initially the CSW collected work from Harry's school, and supported him while he completed it – which proved to be a positive way to start building the relationship between the CSW and Harry.

Conversations between the school, Harry, Sue and CSW, identified that full-time mainstream school wasn't for Harry at this time (as everyone was keen to avoid permanent school exclusion), and he was offered a referral to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) as an alternative. Even though this would mean he was with older and potentially more disruptive children, it provided a positive option for Harry. The CSW, Harry and Mum went to visit.

After an initial struggle to settle into the PRU, Harry was doing well and there were noticeable improvements to his concentration and behaviour. However, after half-term he was back to being disruptive, verbally aggressive and subdued. A change in his home life (Mum having a new boyfriend) appeared to prompt this change.

Although there were marked improvements in other areas of Harry's life, he was unable to make sustained progress at school. The PRU are not able to offer him the level of support he needs, as he is not comfortable working in even a small group, and they are unable to sustain one-to-one support with him indefinitely. At the time of data gathering for this case study the CSW was taking Harry to view Highfield Secure Facility, which she hopes will be able to cater for Harry's higher levels of need.

Mum has no support at the moment, so the CSW has referred her to the Adult Learning Disabilities team for an assessment of need. The CSW is contacting the team on a regular basis but nothing has happened as yet. One of the biggest challenges the Keys to the Future team face is that 'mostly when we're working with parents who do things right or who just need a bit of support, but Sue needs a lot of support and reiteration of information and it can take her weeks to understand information... she finds reading and writing difficult, so keeping a log of Harry's behaviour is difficult and we can't give written follow up'.

Harry has a lot of responsibility at home and, for example: 'He has to deal with letters from the benefits people, and rent arrears. Often the weight and responsibility of an adult are on a 12-year-olds shoulders'. So the CSW has been bringing him into the service's family room to do art work, play games and generally have some time out.

In addition to the one-to-one support with Harry, the CSW has worked with the family and helped them to develop house rules and a chore rota, she has encouraged them to have fun as a family by taking them on a bowling trip as: 'Currently going to Asda is the only family activity they do'. She has undertaken siblings sessions, designed to offer fun activities outside the home such as bowling and sharing lunch together, which have helped build a better relationship between the brothers.

## Outcomes

Mum is very pleased with the service she receives from Shelter and was very happy that the family were 'living in a safer area now'. She thinks that Harry is: 'less angry and less upset than last year. Was a bad patch last year, and that was very worrying'. Harry also feels he is calmer and less aggressive at home, and commented: 'I am less stressed, not getting so angry and fighting with my brother so much, so that's better.'

Mum thinks that Harry is much more confident and he has started to make friends near the new house. She feels that the CSW was instrumental in getting the family moved into a new property; both the CSW and the TESS worker went to the housing panel to argue for a fresh start for the family in an area away from where they were either on the receiving end of antisocial behaviour, or where the children were getting involved in fights and engaging in antisocial behaviour themselves.

Mum is working hard to 'set boundaries and get him back into a routine'. She feels that the family meetings, set up by the CSW to talk about Harry's behaviour, have helped and that working with him on his anger issues had been useful.

Even though the PRU is not working out in the way everyone hoped, Harry feels that: 'School is much better. Going to see another behaviour school and that will be OK. I don't know how I feel about it... I am worried that I won't like the teachers'.

Overall, Mum thinks that Harry is: 'getting better, the school is being sorted'. She also reports being less stressed, and commented:

'My nerves had gone, but since I've been here I'm not so stressed. I'd have had a nervous breakdown in the other house. Without [the CSW] he might have been taken off me – it was heading that way – he wasn't going to school. We were getting complaints about him.'

She talked about life in her previous house:

'We have to hide that this is our house now. The kids from where we were before were awful to me, they would start on me and then Harry would flip out – he's very protective of me... Their parents would bang on the door and the lads would attack Harry.'

Harry told us that working with the CSW at Shelter's Keys to the Future service had made him understand the consequences of his actions and, as a result of this and the house move, his: 'behaviour in the community is much better now. My behaviour is generally much better now. Before, I was a 1 and now I'm an 8'<sup>1</sup>. He went on to say of the CSW that: 'She's made me realise about my behaviour, and about not being bad in my area 'cause then stuff can happen to me, I could get arrested. I try to think things through. I don't want to get arrested. I'd like to go to college and get A-levels and all of that.'

Harry feels that he is enjoying life more than he did previously and has: 'more things to do and more things to look forward to... didn't have things to look forward to before and I've made friends...'

He is clearly more aware of the impact his behaviour has on himself and others. However he commented:

'Being bad is easier than being good. When you're bad you don't have to do anything, no-one expects you to do anything.'

Harry went on to say that he wanted to change, that he wanted to get a good job and not end up 'being arrested and stuff'.

1 Harry rated his behaviour on a 1 to 10 scale, with 1 being poor and 10 being excellent.

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