

Keys to the Future

An independent evaluation of Shelter's
Children's Services

Scotland 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 families, the Education Liaison Workers (ELWs), the Policy worker, other Shelter staff, and external stakeholders.

Cover photograph by Kate Stanworth. Other photographs by Nick David 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 Scotland's Keys to the Future service. It presents the findings of qualitative research conducted with staff, stakeholders and case study families. 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

Scotland's Keys to the Future service is designed to minimise the effects of homelessness and poor housing on children and young people's educational achievements.

The service is delivered by Education Liaison Workers (ELWs) working in Shelter Support Services in Glasgow, Dumfries and Galloway, and South Lanarkshire. There was an ELW working in the Shelter Edinburgh Support Service. However, after 10 years of working in Edinburgh, Shelter was unsuccessful in its bid to the local authority for the continuation of a statutory sector funded contract and the Project closed in March 2009. As it would not be practicable to have a stand-alone ELW in Edinburgh, Shelter has successfully negotiated the transfer of this function to its support service in Glasgow. In addition to these four face-to-face workers, the Keys to the Future service also benefits from a dedicated Policy Officer post.

Interventions

The Keys to the Future service supports homeless children by undertaking needs assessments that inform the creation of support packages designed to help ameliorate the impact of their circumstances on educational attainment and attendance.

Such packages can include:

- support with school homework
- reading and literacy games
- learning to tell the time
- worksheets designed to improve literacy and numeracy
- library membership and supported library visits
- help to access transport to and from school
- accessing support from and liaising with other professionals
- accessing grants for school uniforms
- helping children to get into school
- home care support
- advocating and supporting children to access additional support for learning.

This tailored educational support may be delivered by an ELW or volunteer on a one-to-one basis, or through homework or other groups. In addition to educational support the ELWs have an advocacy and liaison role with local agencies.

Delivery against targets

The Scottish Keys to the Future service has requested, and had approved (by The Big Lottery Fund), a variance to their outputs; due to the loss of the Edinburgh Support Service and the subsequent delay in recruiting to the second Glasgow ELW post, and also the loss of the Volunteer Co-ordinator in Glasgow.

Table 1 shows delivery against targets for the period April 2008 to August 2009.

Table 1: Delivery against targets April 2008 to August 2009

Target	Count
Children receiving needs assessment and support	187
Children receiving homework support	80
Children receiving intensive tailored support	8

The definition of intensive tailored support has been reviewed (and agreed by The Big Lottery Fund). The ELWs identified that many of the children and young people who required intensive support to increase school attendance did not necessarily require home care support.

This change in definition comes from a better understanding of the causes of poor attendance at school and awareness that poor attendance is not always due to a lack of routine in the home, but is often a feature of more complex social, environmental and personal issues facing homeless children. Poor attendance may be due to factors such as low self-esteem, bullying, child and parent co-dependency or parental ill health or substance misuse.



Programme reach

The information in this section is based on monitoring data for 181 children supported across the support services during the period April 2008 to August 2009.

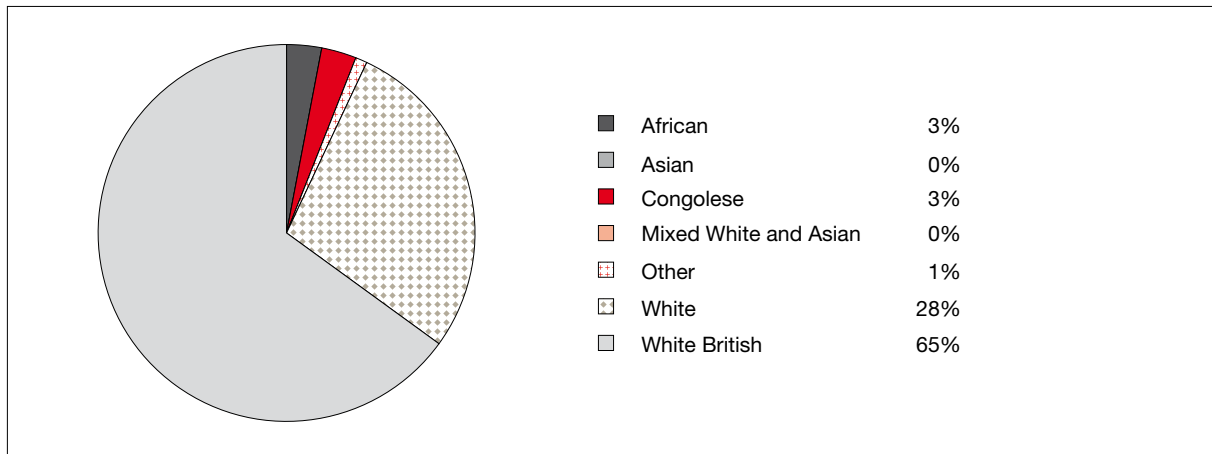
Ethnicity

As can be seen from Chart 1, the majority (117 or 65 per cent) of children supported by the Keys to the Future service are from white British or white backgrounds.

Some six per cent of children are from African and Congolese backgrounds, which compares favourably to the 2001 Census which indicates that two per cent of the population are from a (non white) minority ethnic group, with 0.10 per cent recorded as African and no figures for the percentages of Congolese people living in Scotland.¹ This is particularly interesting as, in Scotland generally, the most visible ethnic minority populations are from Asian communities. It suggests that Keys to the Future is engaging families from new and emerging communities.

¹ Source One Scotland: *No Place for Racism*

Chart 1: Ethnicity of children supported in Scotland



NB Keys to the Future in Scotland uses different ethnicity categories to English Keys to the Future services.

Gender

As can be seen from the table below, the gender balance between boys and girls is almost equally split with the ELWs supporting 100 girls compared to 81 boys.

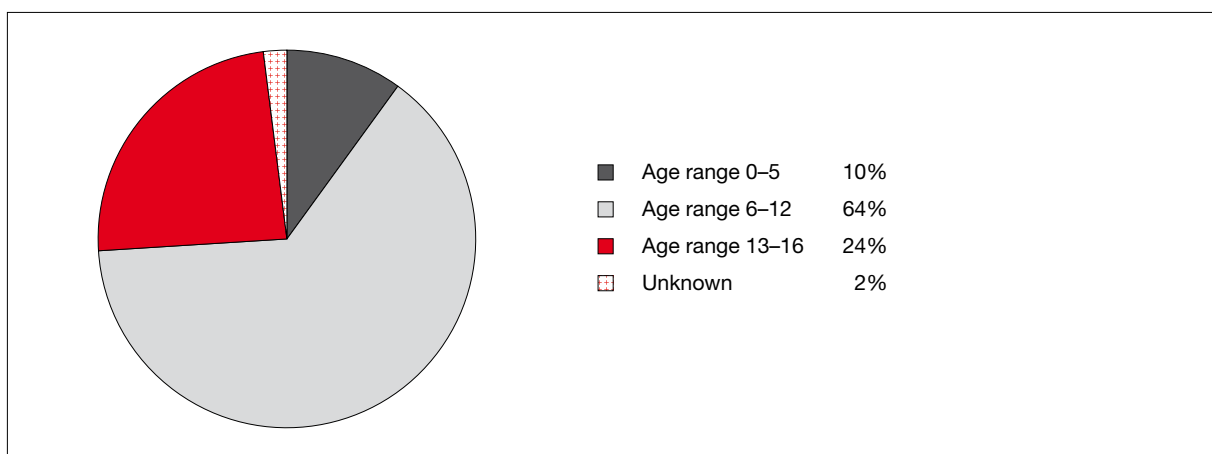
Table 2: Gender of children supported in Scotland

Gender	Count	Percentage
Female	100	55%
Male	81	45%
Total	181	100%

Age

Chart 2 on the following page shows that the majority (64 per cent) of children Keys to the Future has worked with in Scotland are 6- to 12-years-olds. This may demonstrate a gap in services for children in this age range. Referrals for the under-five age range indicate children may be finding pre-school provision challenging, as this extract from an April to June 2009 quarterly report highlights: 'The final referral is for a three-year-old boy who is refusing to attend nursery. He will be starting his pre-school year at nursery in August and his Mum struggles to cope with his behaviour since the family was made homeless.'

Chart 2: Ages of children supported in Scotland

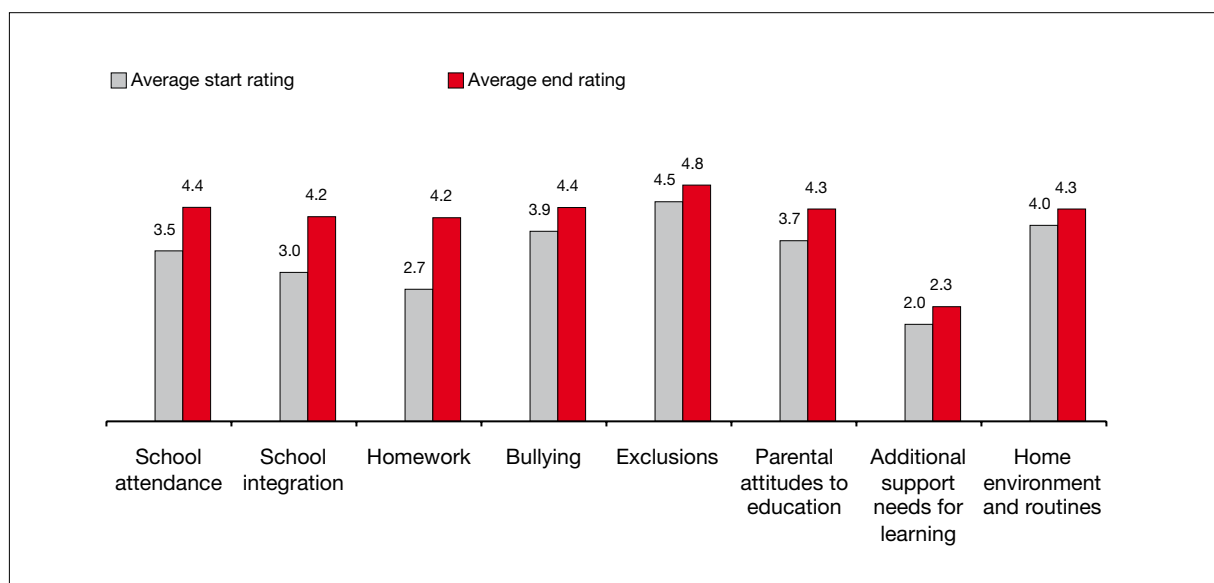




Impact and outcomes

Graph 1 shows improvements across the Scottish indicators. It is worth noting that the ratings for Scotland's Keys to the Future indicators are measured differently from those in England, with '1' being the most negative rating and '5' being the positive rating.

Graph 1: Average improvement, closed cases April 2008 to August 2009



To date, homework shows the biggest improvement for those children who have now exited the service. Children are better able to carry out homework (albeit they may still need some support), but are now more motivated to complete it and understand the importance of doing it. Positive change has been recorded against both behavioural outcomes such as bullying and ‘hard’ outcomes such as school attendance.

The other major improvement area has been in school integration with children becoming more settled in school as a result of support from the service. In addition, ELWs have been involved with children with additional educational support needs and have worked closely with schools to ensure that children have access to these services (eg educational psychology).

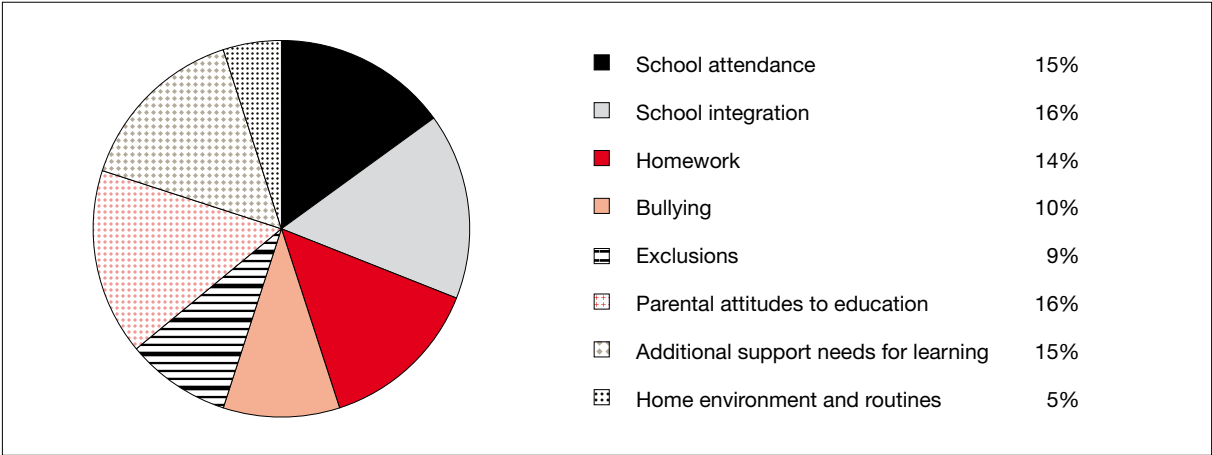
‘Soft’ outcomes include, for example:

- ensuring a child is accepted into a school near where they live, as in the case of the South Lanarkshire case study
- helping a mother to understand the role she can play in her children’s education
- developing a child’s self-confidence who, as a result, is more resilient or better able to make and maintain friendships or enjoy going to school. For example, one child told us that she: ‘feels much happier, every time I used to get homework, I used to get stuck with it, and then [the ELW] and [volunteer] started to help me with my homework and it just got easier... the best bit is that they helped me improve handwriting and spelling, people can understand my handwriting better. I didn’t used to care about homework, but I enjoy doing my homework now.’

In terms of interventions with children and their families, Chart 3 shows the relative percentages of education indicators and outcomes for the children supported to date. Children may have been supported against more than one outcome.

In terms of individual educational indicators, 51 parents have been supported to engage more fully with their children in homework activities, engage in conversations about school or activities and show an interest in their child(ren)’s education. Fifty-one children are better integrated into school. A further 49 have improved school attendance. All of this clearly indicates that the service is significantly increasing children’s chances of succeeding at school. Further details of the changes brought about for children and families are included in the case study materials.

Chart 3: Count of educational indicators April 2008 to August 2009



The ELWs have put in place approaches that are helping children to achieve. There is clear evidence of this from the case study families.

For example:

Two sisters from one of the case study families told us: 'The time we didn't go to school she came out and gave us workbooks and when I went back to school my teacher said I was really good.'

And: 'She gave us books and she helped me to divide and all that, and helped me read better. When I went back to school, the first week I got a star from the teacher for best reading. I was shocked when she said my name.... it felt like I was being appreciated.'

Another case study child commented: 'When I got Star of the Week I know it was because [the ELW] helped me.'

Another said: 'School used to be boring and hard, it's better now, I've got friends and I've got a best friend – she's going to secondary school, but she will be in a different class to me. Another friend... will be in the same class as me.'

Supporting and enabling school attendance

All of the Keys to the Future services in Scotland support, encourage and enable children to attend school, and all the case study families were able to identify how Key to the Future had helped them ensure their children were able to attend school.

Case study: Keys to the Future, South Lanarkshire Supporting and enabling school attendance

Profile of family

Anne is a single parent currently on a methadone script. She has four children of which three live with her – Alice (14), Lucy (10) and Mia (nine). All these children have a history of child protection concerns and recently returned from a six-month stay with extended family in Ireland. On return, all three girls were placed on the child protection register.

Keys to the Future's interventions

The ELW has worked with all three children to help them reintegrate in school, in addition to supporting all three children while school places were being identified for them.

The two younger children were able to go back into the school they had been attending before the family went to Ireland. However, Alice was originally offered a place at a school which could not offer the subjects she wanted to do and was a considerable distance from her home. The ELW had to invest considerable time and effort into negotiating with schools and collaborating with the child protection officer to ensure that Alice could return to the same school, doing the examination subjects she was looking to do.

In addition the ELW has supported the family with some very practical things, such as ensuring the children receive free school meals, helping to access grants and funds to buy school uniforms, and assisting Mum to access funds to help with transport costs to collect her methadone prescription.

Outcomes

Support from Keys to the Future helped stabilise the family situation and Anne contrasted this with their previous experience of homelessness when the family had lived in seven different temporary accommodation places in two years, which had resulted in the children becoming very disruptive, cheeky and hard to manage – which had not been the case this time.

Mum felt she could not have got Alice into school without the ELW's support. She commented:

'The big achievement has been getting the oldest child into higher school. Primary school – with [KTTF] support – had accepted younger children – but getting the eldest daughter into school had been difficult. It would have been impossible without [KTTF], and getting the children into school was a condition... otherwise social services would have taken the children into care.'

She went on to say: 'The school was really difficult and I knew I had to get her in otherwise it really was the children going into care. She [the ELW] really persevered, kept on at the school, made the case. I could not have done that. Alice was getting really depressed when schools were rejecting her and she [the ELW] really picked her up.'

Anne told us:

'All I can say is thanks. Without her [the ELW] I'm sure the children would have ended up out of school and in care.'

Collaboration with other Shelter services

The synergy between Shelter's other services and the Keys to the Future service is important, because for families working with Shelter there is not necessarily a distinction (nor should there need to be one) between family support, child support and the ELW role. For one case study family with previous experience of Shelter eight years ago (when she had received support and advice to sort out her housing with which she was very happy), the added value of the Keys to the Future ELW role was clear: 'It was a big difference. Much better, more helpful, because the things in your life are not just housing.'

Families appreciate the mix of practical and emotional support on offer. As one case study parent commented, Shelter staff were always: 'seeing the positive in you when you can't see it yourself.'

The combination of housing, family, child and educational support has enabled some of the case study parents to keep their families together – for example, either by acting as a powerful advocate for the family in child protection proceedings or by sorting out accommodation so that the parent could continue to look after their child.

In Glasgow, where the child support worker and the ELW are both offering support to the case study child, their roles are complementary. The Child Support Worker (CSW) has found working in conjunction with the ELW has enabled her to focus on the emotional support needs of the child. Moreover, the child has 'benefitted from having two people working with her' and both Shelter staff have been able to remind the family about appointments and, in this way, support each other's appointments to take place.

Case study: Keys to the Future, Glasgow Collaboration with other Shelter services

Profile of family

Jane (11) and her mother Dawn were living in Jane's Dad's one-bedroom flat. Jane's father has physical and mental health problems and is frequently in hospital. All the family were struggling to come to terms with the death of Jane's younger sibling, and Dawn in particular was finding it difficult to cope with her grief. Jane was referred to the ELW by the Shelter Child Support Worker when it became apparent that Jane was not attending school regularly, was struggling with school work generally, and finding it difficult to make friends because of her irregular attendance.

Keys to the Future's interventions

Shelter sorted out the family's housing situation. The CSW undertook play therapy sessions with Jane designed to explore the difficulties she was experiencing, and introduced her to a Season's for Growth Group for children who have experienced significant loss in their lives.

The ELW offered regular homework support through a mix of home visits and trips to the library. Jane also attended out-of-school activities in the holidays organised by Shelter.

Outcomes

Overall Jane's attendance at school has improved. Her attendance was less than 49 per cent when the ELW first met her. By September 2008 it had increased to 86 per cent, settling back to 66 per cent by April 2009.

The ELW reports that Jane is 'more confident, animated and less closed in' and that her handwriting has improved: 'She has more confidence with both her peers and adults. Her increased confidence has certainly helped improve relationships with her peers.' Mum felt that the Shelter interventions had helped Jane to establish relationships more easily and that she really enjoyed group activities which Mum had not expected. She commented that: 'She has been bullied at school but she is getting her confidence back, and that is a big thing as Jane was so shy and she only has a very small number of friends' and that 'she made friends when they went on the trips in the summer'. Mum feels that the relationship between her and Jane has improved now that Jane is more confident and outgoing, and that she and her daughter 'get on better and can talk now'.

Mum feels that Jane is better able to cope with school and that this has helped to improve her attendance. Jane told us that she feels much happier:

'Every time I used to get homework, I used to get stuck with it, and then [the ELW] and [volunteer] started to help me with my homework and it just got easier... the best bit is that they helped me improve handwriting and spelling. People can understand my handwriting better. I didn't used to care about homework, but I enjoy doing my homework now.'

Their housing situation is now fairly stable and the family are in a two-bed flat in a tower block, where Jane has a bedroom of her own.

'They sorted out our housing and got us a place. I'd still be homeless if it weren't for Shelter. If I was still homeless I really could not look after Jane. I would struggle to get her to school and look after her.'

Dawn

Working with volunteers

Working with volunteers to deliver the homework service adds value to the Keys to the Future offer, and from the information gathered for case studies there is clearly a strategy in place for volunteer involvement. Two ELWs identified how they used volunteers as part of a planned exit strategy from one-to-one support, and in Dumfries and Galloway volunteers work alongside the ELW to deliver support at homework clubs.

Given the area that the Keys to the Future service covers in Dumfries and Galloway (some 2,000 square miles), the ELW has to be creative in the way she uses her time and has developed homework clubs where six or so children are brought together. This approach both allows her to support a greater number of children than just offering one-to-one approaches would do, and offers the children an opportunity to meet others with similar experiences.

The involvement of volunteers is central to the ELW support offer. However, the recruitment, training, management and support of volunteers is being made more difficult in Glasgow and South Lanarkshire where the Volunteer Co-ordinator is either not in post or has been ill for some while, which is creating an additional level of complexity for the ELWs to manage.

Homework clubs

The homework clubs appear to be working well, and are supporting children's educational achievement. The peer support element of homework clubs should not be underestimated. The Dumfries and Galloway ELW has found that the children at the clubs spend time talking to each other about their homelessness/housing situation and that many of them had found this really helpful. She also found that: 'Lots of bullying happens due to homelessness, and we have a lot of girls referred to us for homework support because they are being bullied'. These girls were able to talk about how they felt at the homework club and get support from each other as well as from the ELW and volunteers.

Case study: Keys to the Future, Dumfries and Galloway Homework clubs

Family profile

Mum (Sarah) has two children: Con, aged seven, and Logan (a baby). Sarah had been sleeping with Logan on the floor of her mother's flat for nine months and then in temporary hostel accommodation for a further four months. The hostel was 60 miles away from school, which meant that Con had missed four months of education while living there, and Sarah was concerned that while the hostel accommodation was 'okay', it had disrupted Con's education.

Keys to the Future's interventions

Con attends a homework club run by the ELW and there has been an improvement in his reading skills. Given the area that the Keys to the Future service covers in Dumfries and Galloway (some 2,000 square miles), the ELW has to be creative as to how she uses her time and has developed homework clubs where six or so children are brought together and she has trained the volunteers she works with to run further clubs.

Mum was very concerned about Con's education and, although he was in Primary 2, he was still struggling with Primary 1 level work. Mum had raised her concerns with the school, but the school didn't feel there was anything to worry about. Following the ELW's referral to an education psychologist who agreed that Con had additional support needs, and with support from the ELW, Sarah moved Con to a new school that agrees he does need additional support, and at present the ELW is working in partnership with the school and the educational psychologist to ensure that the work Con does at the homework club fits with the approach the school is using.

Outcomes

Shelter were able to sort out the family's accommodation and help Mum to deal with practical issues such as sorting out the TV licence and bill payments.

Sarah says that the ELW had been instrumental in getting her son into a new school that was more supportive, and feels that without the support of the ELW to work through the complex referral systems her son would not have achieved a school transfer so quickly.

She reports that Con loves homework club, and Mum felt that he had got a lot out of it, gaining new skills through the homework club and holiday activity groups. She also reported that Con was more confident and sociable, found it easier to talk with her, and that he was making friends.

Sarah felt that one important difference was that the old school had resisted ELW involvement while the new school welcomed it and actively worked with the ELW around the needs assessment and providing tailored homework support. This has resulted in real improvements in Con's reading, and contributed to the fact that he is catching up in terms of expected school standards.

Sarah feels that without support from Keys to the Future her son would 'have still been at his old school, not happy and not learning because they did not recognise his needs.'

Measuring progress

Data and information is recorded in the 'Outcomes Matrix', which offers a practical management tool for recording and capturing information about progress and outcomes. As one ELW remarked, the: 'Matrix really does help in measuring a child's progress and really does build evidence. Once a child is a 4 or 5 across the Matrix, then I have put in place a slowly phased approach to withdrawal; for example, moving from weekly to fortnightly, and then monthly support.'



Stakeholder perspectives

The Keys to the Future service, in addition to delivering services to children, is also looking to work with key statutory agencies on issues of housing and education, to share good practice widely and to influence local and national level policy.

At an operational level, the ELWs report mixed success at working with local stakeholders. However, where ELWs are able to engage with other agencies, there is evidence that they add value.

In South Lanarkshire the ELW is becoming established and is participating in local networks. She feels that the learning from Keys to the Future is starting to influence local strategy – for example, the Education Service Anti-bullying group. She has also been involved with social workers, who are starting to understand the issues facing families trying to get their children into schools near to where they have been rehoused. In Glasgow, the ELW has ‘met with various people, from education psychologists to the Homelessness Case Work Team’ and undertakes mail shots, presentations and workshops to stimulate external referrals.

In Dumfries and Galloway, the ELW has a good relationship with the local authority’s homelessness unit where staff now inform families about, and encourage them to engage with, the Keys to the Future service even when the family has indicated they do not want to work with Shelter more generally.

ELWs often attend multi-agency meetings, and as one external stakeholder commented: '[The ELW] has an added value to staff. Often, in multi-agency meetings, it is so useful to have someone to speak to that side of a child's life, how are the family engaging, which really is allowing us to grasp how well that family is doing – are they ready, for example, to move into a permanent home?'

External stakeholders commented on the ELW, as: 'providing a bridge between us and the school, these broader principles are helpful... support such as this can help break the cycle by preventing truancy.'

Feedback on progress with families is important, particularly to statutory sector stakeholders who commented: 'We get good feedback from [the ELW], all the officers find working with her easy, she provides feedback about cases and they are enthusiastic about the service... The Feedback from [KTTF] is excellent and much better than from lots of other projects.'

Another stakeholder commented: '[The ELW] adds value to our work, she can often raise issues we overlook, and it is helpful for [the child] to have someone to help badger school and to spend one-to-one time with her.' And another said: '[KTTF] has got it right in terms of filling a gap. Education doesn't always pick up on homelessness. They may be aware of the issues... part of the difficulty is confidentiality. There is no easy way to alert schools to homelessness, and if they don't know they can't help.'

Despite an information campaign which meant that all schools in the Keys to the Future areas received information about the service, the ELWs have all found it challenging to work strategically with schools and to develop partnership working arrangements. Staff report that they are able to work on an individual basis with individual teachers. As one ELW commented: 'Where schools have been supportive of ELW role, it has been on an individual teacher level – it's hard to get into middle management which impacts on my ability to get into the right meetings.' The ELWs also find that information from schools 'varies significantly – I do try to link with the school and use their materials, but often have to gauge where a child is at by using a selection of activities/materials'. An ELW told us: 'Working with some schools has been difficult. On the one hand there are those schools who have welcomed the homework and practical support [KTTF] offers as an additional resource. Others have seen anyone coming in from the outside and offering anything educational as a sort of threat to their professionalism.'

Issues of size and geography also present a barrier to more collaborative working, as one stakeholder observed: 'In Glasgow, it's so large that they may not be able to notice one ELW even when she is doing excellent work. The work they are all doing on an individual level is excellent. The key gap is getting into strategic influencing to tell people about the impact of homelessness, and particularly about the impact of homelessness on children and young people and what their needs are.'

Notwithstanding these issues, the information gathered from the case study families would suggest that the ELWs are effective in working in partnership with other agencies to ensure that children and young people receive the most appropriate packages of services for them. The ELWs have also developed new ways of raising awareness about the needs of homeless children. In Dumfries and Galloway, for example, parents of children working with the ELW are now asked if they would like Keys to the Future to inform the school about their housing situation, and most parents say 'yes'.

The service has also made links with the Scottish Inspectorate for Schools. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE), with a particular brief to look at Interrupted Learning, has, since meeting the ELWs, given a presentation at Shelter Children's Conference. Since coming into contact with the ELWs, the HMIE is exploring the particular issues experienced by homeless children and young people as 'the reason for interrupted learning is important... children in the homelessness system will have a different experience, they may have chaotic lifestyles...'



Influencing policy

Policy development around homeless children and families is led by one full-time Policy and Practice Co-ordinator located within the central Shelter Policy team who has been in post since June 2008. The objectives being worked towards are summarised in Appendix 1.

Whereas in England a key element of Keys to the Future involves undertaking test cases to influence and change homelessness legislation and legal precedence, in Scotland the work has focussed on ensuring that the legislation already in place for the protection of homeless families translates into good practice on the ground:

‘The law in Scotland has extended the rights and protection of homeless children and families. So in many ways the housing framework we are working in is substantially better than in England. For us the issues are really influencing the ‘joining up’ of policy and practice – so education, housing, health and social care – and acting as advocates for a better quality of social housing for families.’

Keys to the Future worker

Much of the focus has, therefore, been on highlighting the impact of poor housing on children’s life chances. Lobbying to ensure that legislation is translated into practice and housing providers meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard to address over-crowding, lax property maintenance

and tackle the rise in the number of children living in temporary accommodation. Central to this has been ensuring that the Scottish Government, through the Minister for Children and Early Years, produces robust guidance for local authorities regarding meeting the best interests of children facing homelessness. Shelter played a key role in the drafting of consultative papers (March 2009), including consultation with children to inform the draft with final guidance pending.

Influencing work has also been at the forefront of:

- ensuring that housing and homelessness issues are integral both to Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and the Government's Curriculum for Excellence
- ensuring that the links between childhood social exclusion, poor housing and fuel poverty are explicitly addressed in the devolved local authority single outcomes agreements. It was reported that the greater autonomy now afforded authorities meant that there was a danger that these linked issues slipped down the policy and spending agenda.

Further work is also being undertaken to identify good practice alternatives to eviction and it was noted by the Policy Officer that Keys to the Future 'will help us ground any suggestions we might have in offering solutions to reducing eviction rates before the point of eviction in families' experiences and what has already worked in [the Shelter service] practice'.

Policy development has, therefore, operated at a number of levels. Strong links have been developed with South Lanarkshire and South Ayrshire local authorities and social landlords in Glasgow. However, work at the local level is not the primary focus for policy development. The initiative is well networked with a range of national groupings, including the Runaways Coalition, Children's Policy Officer's Network and the Scottish Youth Housing Network. Further, there are direct contacts into the Scottish Government in both education and housing matters at a senior Civil Servant, the Children's Commissioner, and ministerial level.

Keys to the Future policy process

A very clear strategy and process for influencing policy and practice in Scotland has emerged over the last year to 18 months. The experiences of children and their families, along with quantitative research, inform interventions that in turn inform local practice in housing and education, which in turn inform national good practice guidance.

In 2009 this influencing process involved:

- narrative research on children and young people's views on where they live (January 2009),² linked to
- quantitative research on 'the facts' – bad housing and homelessness for children in Scotland.³

These have then informed a series of high profile conferences and events, for example:

- the Shelter Children and Homelessness Conference, involving the Minister for Children and Early Years
- 'Poverty: Puzzled? Workshops' with the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Both reports and succeeding events have substantially raised the national media profile of issues faced by homeless children and families. Influencing work in Scotland has a high profile in local/ central government, among housing providers and, increasingly, the media.

Influencing policy takes time, and embedding policy into good practice takes longer. There have been set backs, in particular the removal of ring-fencing for Supporting People funding for vulnerable groups. Also, local authorities now have greater budget-setting autonomy under Single Outcome Agreements, making it harder to ensure housing/homelessness issues are addressed in children's

2 Shelter Scotland, *Acting in the best interests of homeless children: views of children and young people on where they live*, 2009

3 Shelter Scotland, *The facts: bad housing and homelessness for children in Scotland*, 2009

services. Further, they were reported by a Shelter interviewee as: 'struggling to meet the requirements of homelessness legislation within current resources and simply cannot meet, in many cases, requirements under unsuitable accommodation orders.'

There have been advances at the local level. In Dumfries and Galloway, for example, questions on children's education/needs are now a routine part of homelessness/housing assessment. According to a Shelter interviewee, the national Shelter Children's Conference suggested that, beyond the local level, housing and homelessness officers are: 'beginning to think much more about the needs of children in their decisions. They are beginning to realise that housing decisions – whether that's temporary accommodation or evictions – have a significant impact and effect on other local authority departments'.



Lessons learnt

The service has already identified one key change to delivery outputs by gaining a better understanding of the barriers to education facing homeless children. This learning about the complexity of the issues for homeless families continues to inform the development of the service.

Supporting children with complex needs

Keys to the Future in Scotland have been successful in working with children and families that have complex and multiple needs. Homelessness (and often worklessness) may be seen as usual, with more than one generation of the same family experiencing similar issues. This can lead to antipathy towards the value of education. Staff have been effective at gaining the trust of families and providing children with individualised packages of support that meet these needs and raise awareness within the family about the importance of education.

Building trusting relationships

Families and children appreciate that Keys to the Future is different from the other agencies with which they come in contact and, certainly in the case study families, staff have been successful in building relationships with families who have little reason to trust external agencies.

Advocacy

ELWs can act as powerful advocates for children and their families by, for example, providing information in child protection proceedings that can enable families to stay together, or by using their knowledge of the 'system', particularly in education, to ensure that children receive the support they need from services to help them succeed.

Adding value

The ELW role adds value to existing Shelter roles, such as child and family support workers. Staff are clear about the benefits of such approaches, and have put systems in place to ensure effective joint working, avoiding duplication while retaining the integrity of each separate professional role.

Valued partner

Where Shelter can build local level relationships they are viewed as a valued partner. They add value to agencies' existing knowledge about families. Additionally, staff are able to raise awareness about the impact of homelessness on children and young people more generally.

Appendix 1: Keys to the Future policy objectives, Scotland

Policy objective 1

A duty is placed on local authorities to assess and meet the needs of all children in homeless families living in temporary accommodation.

Policy objective 2

The Getting it Right for Every Child agenda incorporates targets and measures that reflect the impact of homelessness and bad housing on children's wellbeing.

Policy objective 3

Local authority structural arrangements for the provision of services to children to include formal integration of council departments.

Policy objective 4

Local authorities, when pursuing eviction proceedings for antisocial behaviour, take into account children's needs for a safe and secure home.

Policy objective 5

There is adequate provision of support and tenancy sustainment for families with children that have been deemed intentionally homeless.

Policy objective 6

A duty is placed on local authorities to develop and publish arrangements between housing and social work departments' services to ensure that 16- and 17-year-olds are adequately housed.

Policy objective 7

A duty is placed on local authorities to provide temporary accommodation to homeless families, which does not leave children unnecessarily having to miss out on school nor travel unreasonable distances to school, nor change schools frequently.

Policy objective 8

Funding to be made available to local authorities to establish peer education services and support services aimed at preventing and alleviating the damage of homelessness.

Policy objective 9

Ensuring that phasing out of 'priority need' categories, in the assessment of homelessness in the run up to 2012, does not unintentionally mean that families with children have reduced access to permanent housing.

Appendix 2: Detailed case study material

Dumfries and Galloway case study

Profile of family

Mum (Sarah) has two children: Con, aged seven, and baby Logan. Sarah and the children had been living with Con's step father; however, following his arrest the day before interview, she had decided to end the relationship.

Sarah had been sleeping with Logan on the floor of her mother's flat for nine months, and then in temporary hostel accommodation for a further four months. The hostel was 60 miles away from school which meant that Con had had a four-month gap in his education while the family were living there, and they were concerned that while the hostel accommodation was 'okay' it had disrupted Con's education.

Sarah had received support from Shelter during this time and the Family Support Worker (there is no Child Support Worker in Dumfries and Galloway) had encouraged her to be proactive in lobbying the local authority's homelessness department for accommodation. Sarah said: 'I phoned them every day, and when I knew a friend was moving out of her place, I really pushed and pushed them.' She felt that Shelter's support in doing this had been important, especially in 'filling in the forms and visiting every week when I was in the hostel to check everything was okay'.

Referral route

She had been referred to Shelter by the local homelessness team at the council in August 2007. In August 2008 the Family Support Worker referred them on to an ELW because of Sarah's concerns about Con's education.

Needs identification

Mum 'was very proactive about education', but was very concerned that although he was in Primary 2 he was still struggling with Primary 1 level work. Mum had raised her concerns with the school, but the school didn't feel that there was anything to worry about. Sarah felt that the school were ignoring Con's additional support needs.

'The school said Con was behind because he just needed to catch up with being out of education... but I knew it was more than this.'

Sarah

The ELW assessment identified that Con had additional support needs and didn't, for example, seem to be able to retain information and needed regular reminders to undertake simple repetitive tasks – for example, he could not recall from one day to another where he needed to hang his coat up when he got to school.

Keys to the Future's interventions

The ELW made approaches to the school to see if they would refer Con to an educational psychologist, but the school felt that this was unnecessary.

Shelter's service, through the ELW, then referred Con to an educational psychologist for an assessment and the psychologist agreed that he did have additional support needs.

With support from the ELW Sarah moved Con to a new school which agrees he does need additional support and, at present, the ELW is working in partnership with the school and the educational psychologist to ensure that the work the ELW does with Con fits with the approach the school is using.

Con attends a homework club run by the ELW and there has been an improvement in his reading skills. Given the area that the Keys to the Future service covers in Dumfries and Galloway (some 2,000 square miles), the ELW has to be creative in how she uses her time, and she has developed homework clubs where six or so children are brought together and trained the volunteers she works with to run further clubs.

Outcomes

Sarah feels that ELW had been instrumental in getting her son into a new school that was more supportive; and with arranging speech therapy, occupational therapist and educational psychology assessments, as well as eye and hearing tests. She said: 'The (old) school made me feel that all the problems were in my head and that I was just worrying too much. [The ELW] helped me realise it was more than that and get my son into the new school. There they welcome Shelter support, where the other school sort of resented this involvement of someone from the outside.' She also feels that without the support of the ELW to work through the complex referral systems, her son would not have achieved a school transfer so quickly.

She reports that Con loves the homework club, though he didn't talk much about this at home because 'he has problems with his memory'. However, he really looked forward to going and Mum felt that he had got a lot out of, and gained new skills through, the homework club and holiday activity groups.

She also reported that Con was more confident and sociable and found it easier to talk with her, and that he was making friends. She reported that Con was disappointed that summer/group activities were finishing, as the group activities such as putting on a puppet show had really increased her son's ability to relate to other children and adults.

Mum felt that one important difference was that the old school had resisted ELW involvement and the new school welcomed it and actively worked with ELW around needs assessment and tailored homework support. This has resulted in real improvements in Con's reading, and contributed to the fact he is catching up in terms of expected school standards.

Sarah felt that the ELW had worked with the rest of Shelter in sorting out her accommodation and that moving out of the hostel had been important for Con's development, and that being able to play with friends in the garden and on the street had really built his confidence and ability to build relationships.

Moreover, the practical support offered through the Family Support Worker and the ELW (such as sorting out TV licence/gas bills payment, and so forth) was as important as emotional support she received because it helped to reduced stress and worry about 'practical things'.

Con did recall being involved in the homework club and 'trying to make an instrument – drums and shaker, and a guitar, and trying to make sounds'. He also felt that the homework club had helped him to make new friends and he liked that. However, he was much more focussed on telling the research team about the events of the day before and the fact that his step father had been 'arrested for speeding'.

Sarah feels that without support from Shelter, her son would 'have still been at his old school, not happy and not learning because they did not recognise his needs'.

Glasgow case study

Profile of family

Jane (11) and her mother Dawn live together with Jane's father who has health problems and is frequently in hospital. At the time of referral, they were sharing a one-bedroom flat with him. Now their housing situation is fairly stable and the family are in a two-bed flat in a tower block, where Jane now has a bedroom of her own. Dawn often finds the competing demands on her time difficult to manage.

'It's juggling all the time. Looking after Jane, making sure she gets to school, looking after the old man – getting to his house, making sure he takes his tablets, going to see him in hospital. It feels like it's neverending.'

Dawn

Jane is about to move in to high school at the start of the new academic year.

Referral route

The Shelter Child Support Worker referred Jane to the ELW in May 2008, when it became apparent that there were issues at school.

Dawn originally found out about Shelter through a friend and commented: 'They don't advertise enough. Without my friend I would not have known about them. They sorted her out as well.'

Needs identification

Jane had a very poor school attendance record, and both Jane and her teacher identified that her poor handwriting was a major problem for her. As Mum commented: 'Her problem's with writing. She struggles. You can see it. She tries and then she sort of freezes, and you can see she gets frustrated.' Jane also needed additional support with spelling, maths and language skills. One of the consequences of the prolonged school absence (which tended to be typified by blocks of non-attendance rather than occasional days) was that Jane found it difficult to maintain relationships with her peers.

Jane does have some health problems, and these have certainly contributed to the number of school absences.

Keys to the Future's interventions

Following an initial assessment using child-friendly assessment tools and a conversation with Jane's mother who is her main carer, coupled with an assessment of the family's relationship with the school and information from Jane's teacher, the ELW devised a support plan.

Initially the ELW took an organic approach to working with Jane and prioritised breaking down barriers to working together and overcoming Jane's shyness. The first activity was designed to empower Jane and it involved Jane interviewing the ELW for a Shelter Newsletter. The ELW also took Mum to see the head at Jane's school, with the intention that this visit would start to break down barriers between Dawn and school and help Dawn to recognise the importance of ensuring Jane attended on a regular basis.

Jane's teacher identified that she needed support with handwriting. The ELW has worked hard to maintain links with school, and initially this resulted in Jane's teacher providing work for Jane to do. However, latterly this has tailed off.

From May 2008 to January 2009 the ELW met Jane on a weekly basis, apart from in the summer holidays when they were meeting every two weeks, and Jane has made solid and steady progress. The homework support consisted of two contact-time hours and offered a mix of support 'at home' and visits to the library etc. Jane attended Shelter's out-of-school activities during the holidays.

Given Jane's progress, the ELW decided to transfer her over to Sue (a Shelter home care support volunteer) who continues to meet with Jane mainly outside the home. The volunteer offers homework support but, for example, has on occasion collected Jane from school and waited with her until Mum can get back from visiting Dad in hospital. Dawn has cancelled a number of sessions with the volunteer, the reasons for which are not clear. Jane has told the ELW that she would like to continue to work with Sue; however, it would appear that the level of cancellations is higher than that experienced by other volunteers.

In addition to the one-to-one support, the ELW has sorted out transport for Jane through the special educational needs transport service, and has been supporting Dawn with a prosecution for Jane's non-attendance at school and was able to make a positive statement about the family that helped

inform the proceedings. The prosecution was a 'harsh, but important, reminder to Mum about her obligations on attendance', we were told by the Keys to the Future worker.

Outcomes

Overall, Jane's attendance at school has improved. Attendance was less than 49 per cent when the ELW first met her. By September 2008 it had increased to 86 per cent, 76 per cent by January 2009, and was at 66 per cent in April 2009.

Jane is very pleased that her handwriting has improved, and says: 'People can understand my handwriting better now, it is so much better. It used to be very scribbly.'

The ELW reports that Jane is 'more confident, animated and less closed in' and that her handwriting has improved: 'She has more confidence with both her peers and adults. Her increased confidence has certainly helped improve relationships with her peers.' Mum felt that the Keys to the Future interventions had helped Jane to establish relationships more easily and that she really enjoyed group activities, which Mum had not expected. She commented that: 'She has been bullied at school, but she is getting her confidence back and that is a big thing as Jane was so shy and she only has a very small number of friends' and that 'She made friends when they went on the trips in the summer'. Mum feels that the relationship between her and Jane has improved now, that Jane is more confident and outgoing, and that she and her daughter 'get on better and can talk now'.

'School used to be boring and hard. It's better now, I've got friends and I've got a best friend – she's going to secondary school, but she will be in a different class to me. Another friend... will be in the same class as me.'

Jane

Mum feels that Jane is better able to cope with school and that this has helped to improve her attendance. Jane told us that she feels 'much happier. Every time I used to get homework, I used to get stuck with it, and then [the ELW] and [volunteer] started to help me with my homework and it just got easier... The best bit is that they helped me improve handwriting and spelling, people can understand my handwriting better. I didn't used to care about homework, but I enjoy doing my homework now'.

South Lanarkshire case study

Profile of family

Anne is a single parent currently on a methadone script, but has not used heroin in almost a year, she has four children, and the older child (18) lives in Ireland. The three other children are Alice (14), Lucy (10), and Mia (nine years). These three children have a history of child protection concerns and recently returned from a six-month stay with extended family in Ireland. On returning to Scotland, all three girls were placed on the child protection register.

Referral route

The family was referred to the Keys to the Future service's ELW by the homeless strategy unit of South Lanarkshire council in April 2009, with the case being formally opened in May 2009.

Needs identification

At the first meeting with the family, the ELW used an assessment pack that contains, among other things, the Shelter Matrix risk assessment, information sharing protocols, a parent questionnaire, consent forms and a child questionnaire.

The main priority for the ELW was to get the children into school, and to remove obstacles to school attendance such as the school uniforms, head lice and lack of transport.

Keys to the Future's interventions

The ELW works with all the children in the family, but has been working most intensively with the older child, Alice, to find her an appropriate school after a number of schools (including her old one) were unable to offer her a place on the grounds they were full. The ELW has worked with all three children to help them reintegrate in school, in addition to supporting all three children while school places were being identified for them.

The younger two children were able to go back into the school they had been attending before the family went to Ireland. However, the ELW has had to invest considerable time and effort into negotiations with the school, and collaborate with the Child Protection Officer in order to ensure that Alice could return to the same school she had attended, doing the examination subjects she was looking to do, because the place she was originally being offered was a considerable distance from home and unable to offer the subjects she wanted.

In addition the ELW has supported the family with some very practical things, such as:

- sorting out library cards and bus passes for all three children
- negotiating the waiver of a late return fee with the public library for a fine that Anne had accrued on books borrowed and not returned before she went to Ireland
- accessing grants and funds to help the family buy school uniforms and a bug zapper (electric comb for killing head lice)
- ensuring that the children received free school meals
- helping Mum access funds to help with transport costs to collect her methadone prescription.

In addition to this practical support, the ELW has also worked with Alice to help with the transition back into school, and to help her to fully integrate with friends and the school environment.

The ELW sees the family once or twice a week, and estimates that she has spent (during the period May to Sept 2009) between 40 and 50 hours on work with, and for, this family that includes face-to-face contact, time spent in meetings with the family, non-contact administration tasks such as data entry and paperwork, as well as time spent planning and preparing for contact time.

Outcomes

Mum and the ELW report that Alice has successfully integrated back into school life, and is continuing with her studies, and that she has re-engaged with her friendship network well, without experiencing any issues or difficulties that may be associated with such processes.

Mum felt she could not have got her older child into school without Keys to the Future's support and that schools would not have listened to her had she been trying to do this on her own. She felt that getting Alice into school a week before the end of term (and the help with school uniforms, etc) were important, so that she could get to know people again after being in Belfast and had friends to be with over the summer break. She commented: 'The big achievement had been getting the oldest child into higher school. Primary school – with Shelter support – had accepted younger children, but getting the eldest daughter into school had been difficult... It would have been impossible without [KTTF] and getting the children into school was a condition... otherwise social services would have taken the children into care.'

'The school was really difficult, and I knew I had to get her in otherwise it really was the children going into care. She [the ELW] really persevered, kept on at the school, made the case. I could not have done that. Alice was getting really depressed when schools were rejecting her, and she [the ELW] really picked her up.'

Anne

She added: '[The ELW] comes with me to core meetings at social services. They are very negative; they keep going on about my past and how bad things were for the children. She sort of represents you, helps you represent yourself. She sees the positive in you, and is someone by your side rather than someone who just criticises. She helps me think about the future and be positive about it.'

The help from Shelter and the ELW has helped stabilise the family situation, and Anne contrasted this with their previous experience of homelessness when the family had lived in seven different temporary accommodation places in two years that had resulted in the children becoming very disruptive, cheeky and hard to manage – which had not been the case this time.

All three children are attending school regularly. It has not been possible to speak to Alice as part of the research. When the family came to meet the evaluation team, Alice was taking part in activities with her friends and, although a phone interview was discussed, Alice felt that she was too busy with school, friends and life to participate – all of which would seem to indicate that she has fully integrated into networks and teenage life in Lanarkshire.

The two younger children did take part in research and told us that the ELW had helped them to learn to tell the time (something that Mum also commented on in her interview), and that they enjoying playing with the toys that the ELW brought over (again, something that Mum commented on: ‘...for example, teaching the youngest to tell the time, and all the children have access to the toy library which they really enjoy’.)

The younger children said: ‘The time we didn’t go to school she came out and gave us workbooks, and when I went back to school my teacher said I was really good’ and ‘She gave us books and she helped me to divide and all that, and helped me read better. When I went back to school the first week I got a star from the teacher for best reading. I was shocked when she said my name... it felt like I was being appreciated’.

Mia remarked: ‘When I got Star of the Week I know it was because [ELW] helped me.’ She went on to say: ‘She has helped us with some hard, difficult things, and she has been kind and helpful.’

Anne told us: ‘All I can say is thanks. Without her [the ELW] I’m sure the children would have ended up out of school and in care.’

Until there's a home for everyone

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